DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 432 403	PS 027 817

AUTHOR	Simons, Bette
TITLE	Tips for Preschool Teachers: First Aid for Bad Times with Directors, Parents, and Difficult Children.
ISBN	ISBN-0-88409-186-4
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	75p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Creative Book Company for First Step Nursery and Child Development Center, Inc., 6104 Fallbrook Avenue, Woodland Hills, CA 91367-3225; Tel: 818-893-3565; Web site: http://www.1stStep.com ($7 plus $1.25 shipping. California residents must add 8% sales tax).
PUB TYPE	Books (010) -- Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrator Behavior; *Behavior Problems; *Caregiver Child Relationship; *Child Behavior; *Child Care Occupations; Parent Teacher Cooperation; Preschool Education; Preschool Teachers; Teacher Administrator Relationship; Teacher Behavior; Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*Caregiver Behavior

ABSTRACT

This book was written for teachers, directors, and aides who have questions about the problems of working in the day care field. Part 1 of the book, "Hard Times with Directors," contains the sections: (1) "The Bad Things about Good Directors"; (2) "The Good Things about Bad Directors"; (3) "Staff Meeting Stuff"; (4) "Is In-Service Jail Service?"; (5) "So You Want to Be a Director?"; (6) "Help! My School Family Is My Real Family!"; (7) "What a Good Director Wants of You"; (8) "Leaving a Center"; and (9) "Being the Director of a Small Proprietary School." Part 2, "Hard Times with Parents," contains the sections: (1) "Helping Parents to Drop Off Children"; (2) "School Family vs. Gym Space"; (3) "Parents at Risk"; (4) "Getting Picked On at Pick Up Time"; (5) "When Parents Hit Your Kids at Home"; (6) "Some Things Parents Won't Tell You"; (7) "Power Plays"; (8) "Ways to Help Parents"; (9) "When Staff Have Children in School"; and (10) "Some Ways that Parents and Child Care Centers Peeve Each Other." Part 3, "Hard Times with Difficult Children," contains: (1) "Who's a Tough Kid?"; (2) "Bullies"; (3) "When Children Can't Be Touched"; (4) "The Ideal Teacher"; (5) "Is Your Classroom Aide a Third Hand or One Child Too Many?"; (6) "Caring for Kids with Special Needs"; (7) "Each Minute Counts"; (8) "Take a Close Look at Taking Turns"; (9) "What's Behind Squeezing and Mess Making?"; (10) "Sobbing Children"; (11) "Will Children Take after You Someday?"; (12) "Why Is Circle Time a Circus?"; (13) "Are Children Watching Teacher's Disagreements?"; (14) "Children Who Are Spanked"; (15) "Sane Celebrations"; (16) "First Aid for Working with a Difficult Child"; (17) "Conflicts with Center Policies"; (18) "Teacher's Differences Have an Effect on Children"; and (19) "The First Aid Kit of Words." (EV)

****
*   Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made   *
*   from the original document.   *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 432 403

Tips for Preschool Teachers:

First Aid for Bad Times with Directors, Parents, and Difficult Children

By Bette Simons

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Bette Simons
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

PS 027817

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Tips for Preschool Teachers:

First Aid for Bad Times with Directors, Parents, and Difficult Children

Copyright © Bette Simons 1998
Permission to reproduce is granted if credit is given to the author

Published by Creative Book Company
13920 Roscoe Boulevard
Panorama City, CA 91402-4213
(818) 893-3565

For: First Step Nursery School and Child Development Center, Inc.
6104 Fallbrook Avenue
Woodland Hills, CA 91367-3225
http://www.1stStep.com
email: Firststp@packbell.net

ISBN 0-800409-186-4
The reader uses all suggestions in this book at his or her own risk.

A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this book
will be donated to the welfare of young children.

Tips for Preschool Teachers:

First Aid for Bad Times with Directors, Parents, and Difficult Children

By Bette Simons

Table of Contents

Introduction 6

Part I: Hard Times with Directors

The Bad Things About Good Directors 7
The Good Thing About Bad Directors 8
Staff Meeting Stuff 10
Is In-Service Jail Service? 11
So You Want To Be A Director? 12
Help! My School Family Is My Real Family! 15
What A Good Director Wants of You 16
Leaving A Center 17
Being the Director of a Small Propriatary School 19

Part II: Hard Times with Parents

Helping Parents to Drop off Children 21
School Family vs. Gym Space 23
Parents at Risk 24
Getting Picked On at Pick Up Time 25
When Parents Hit Your Kids at Home 26
Some Things Parents Won't Tell You 28
Power Plays 30
Ways to Help Parents 32
When Staff Have Children in School 33
Some Ways That Parents and Child Care Centers Peeve Each Other 35

Part III: Hard Times with Difficult Kids

Who's a Tough Kid? 37
Bullies 38
When Children Can't Be Touched 40
The Ideal Teacher 41
Is Your Classroom Aide a Third Hand or One Child Too Many? 44
Caring for Kids With Special Needs 46
Each Minute Counts 47
Take a Close Look at Taking Turns 49
What's Behind Squeezing and Mess Making? 50
Sobbing Children 51
Will Children Take After You Someday? 53
Why is Circle Time a Circus? 55
Are Children Watching Teacher's Disagreements? 58
Children Who are Spanked 59
Sane Celebrations 60
First Aid for Working With a Difficult Child 62
Conflicts with Center Policies 64
Teacher's Differences Have an Effect on Children 66
The First Aid Kit of Words 67

About the Author 69

Introduction

In preschools, children sometimes scrape their knees, bump their heads or get some kind of owies that require first aid and a hug. But who helps the preschool teachers with their owies? Emotional bumps and bruises are common among early childhood workers.

Taking care of a group of little children is hard work. It requires a lot of picking up, a lot of singing of songs, a lot of knowledge about kid control, and a lot of patience.

In every group of children are there are some difficult children. These children might have a hard time controlling their impulses to hurt, or are having a hard time at home. Teachers need help in knowing what to do with these children who are hurting others or who are hurting emotionally.

At the same time, staff members might have troubles with directors, fellow teachers, or parents. It is distracting at best, and wounding at worst. Yet preschool teachers have the important job of giving children who are separated from their parents the best care that they can give.

This book gives some first aid for the tough times teachers encounter when they face others or face themselves in hard situations.

Bette Simons has been a preschool teacher, a director, an aide, and a college instructor. She is a mother and a grandmother who writes a newspaper column about child care. She's had lots of owies and gets well. You can too.

8

Part 1

Hard Times with Directors

The Bad Things About Good Directors

Ask a preschool teacher or aide what makes a good director and they can easily create a list. A good director:

- Is kind and supportive of teachers
- Excuses you from staff meetings or early childhood conferences if you are too busy
- Forgives you if you are late to work
- Shows you what she means if you need help doing something
- Pays you what you want to earn
- Helps with difficult children, or asks that they leave the center
- Gets you all the supplies you need
- Is friendly and talks to you about problems if you come in the office.

This is a list that may or may not be good for you. What about a staff member that doesn't seem to know how to talk to children, much less manage their rambunctious behavior? Why doesn't she send this person to some workshops, you may think. But the good director never pushes. She knows how tough it is to care for children all day and understands that lots of child care workers are going to school at night or taking care of their own families after work.

It's bad. Every teacher wants to feel she works with a good staff. Is it good if a director is so kind he or she doesn't get after people to grow in learning about children, or doesn't see that they come on time, so the schedule of events can go as planned and you won't be stuck with more than the amount of children that the state says you can legally care for.

> Let's face it. A truly good director, like a good mother, can't be afraid to set limits and set priorities. A sweet, but weak leader can make child care a shaky business.

But one thing you may not want to fault the good director for, is showing you how to do things she wants you to do. After all, she's the one with all the education, so if she has an idea about doing language arts during circle time it's good to see how she would handle a tough group. Yours may be one that turns into "circus circus" every time they hit the rug. Your group time looks more like a soccer field and you either have to chase children to get them there or turn into a marine training sergeant. You don't like how it makes you feel.

The good director comes in with a hand puppet that whispers in her ear and has the children listening in wonderment with their mouths open and quiet, like magic. She sings songs you never heard, on key, and gets the children leaving the circle to be an insect of their choice and coming back when called, all with an empty detergent bottle she's using as a drum. Has she heard of the novelty effect? If she was with the children for 8 hours, wouldn't she be exasperated too?

At least the good director doesn't hold your level of skill against you. If you go into the office she will chat with you and give you ideas about solving your problems. It's too bad she does this with other teachers too, because they come back from breaks so late it often ruins the schedule. She ignores the phone when you are complaining, even though it might be someone asking about how to enroll in the school. She tells you things you can do about those bitters and hitters and if it just doesn't work she asks the parents to find another center. She gives you the hourly wage you ask for.

True, she doesn't always meet payroll on time and someone may have to go to parttime for the sake of the budget, but no one can say she doesn't support her teachers. Maybe if she didn't order all that expensive glitter, those colored pipe stems and bags of pom poms, there would have been more money for staff.

Some things about the good director don't help the program, but they sure make you feel good on the job—if you keep the job.

Let's face it. A truly good director, like a good mother, can't be afraid to set limits and set priorities. A sweet, but weak leader can make child care a shaky business.

The Good Thing About Bad Directors

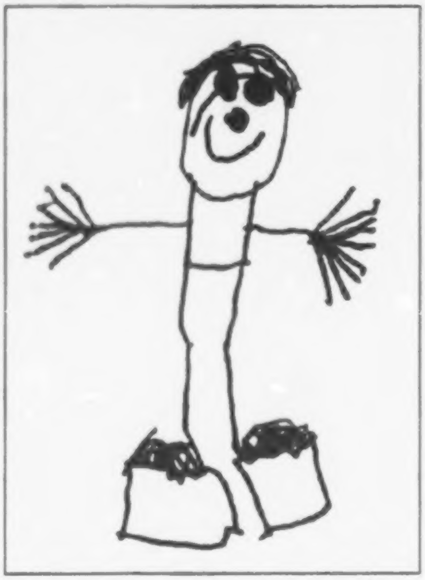
There is a Chinese saying that every crisis is an opportunity. If you work with a really bad or often bad director, maybe you have an opportunity to get stronger in some way.

Teachers often have a hard time when directors stay in the glass box that is their office and never see what's happening in the school. They know directors don't like to be bothered with details all the time, but what are you supposed to do when the swing breaks, the snack tray hasn't come, someone is having a temper tantrum just when a parent has come to visit, you can't leave your group, and the director can't get the phone off of her ear?

Really bad directors do come out sometimes. You wish they would have come out and seen you when you had a really great music time, or you did a good job getting children to settle an argument, or the staff were wishing you a Happy Birthday — the one she forgot about.

Teachers hate not having enough help. That may go with how hard it is to find good workers for child care, but a good director helps to solve staffing problems and either delegates help to another person or gets involved herself.

It's also tough when directors don't understand how difficult some children are. Sometimes a director seems to have nothing going for her except the finances to own and to run the school. You have to learn about behavioral psychology on your own, take classes to improve your own teaching and learn to sell yourself as an accomplished teacher when it's time for a raise.



Being unappreciated a lot and criticized even more can be depressing and it can also make you rely on your own feeling of self worth. It's lucky when staff members are often good to each other.

But when teachers have a lot of trouble going on between them and the director is distanced from things, it's especially hard for teachers to do the difficult job they have to do. Children have lots of problems too.

Every school does well when the leader is someone who can be a wise mother or father to the staff. Better yet, a director who is a good arbitrator and mediator gives the staff confidence in the leadership the school has. After all, most groups of people are going to have disagreements and rub each other the wrong way sometimes. When the leader of the group can't help mediate, teachers can be miserable, or they can be thrown into a tough learning situation.

"Why is this so awful and what can I do about it?" a teacher has to ask herself. Anyone can gossip to a sympathetic ear about it. Everyone can quit. But people who are open to learning the way they want children to be open to new ideas take a different path. Here are some good ideas:

- Develop the courage to talk directly and reasonably to a difficult director
- Be specific and suggest what can be done to solve your problem
- Take a workshop on mediation for children. Win/win works for adults too
- Figure out if you are part of the problem
- Take a day off to cry and make plans to help things get better

A good teacher that works for a bad director can think about why she stays in her work situation, Chances are, she is loyal to her children. Working with children gives us the perspective to work with bad directors. If you don't give up on the children who are troubling, should you give up on the leader?

Live and learn.

Staff Meeting Stuff

Having good staff meetings makes life better for the whole child care center.

It's a relief to vent your feelings about difficult parents or children and you get to have time for planning your programs.

Maybe you get miffed because your center never has a staff meeting to iron out problems. Or do you resent having meetings at night? Maybe you love it because you get to go on a retreat once a year at an owner's expense. Problems to be solved seem less awful in a vacation setting.

But what about your director — does this person feel pleased with staff meetings? Are they productive or a waste of time?

Ideally, a school will have weekly staff meetings. How can a director lead a program without seeing that the goals stated in the school brochure are being met? It's a state law that these are given to parents in writing. It's only moral and good business to see that teachers teach the curriculum. If the brochure states your school has water play, gardening, music and recycling, a director needs to know how you are doing. And you may need to explain why you can't get to the garden weeds and watch the child who is biting at the same time. You may need to help because you can't have water play and get children dry afterwards when there aren't enough towels. Maybe you don't have a container to save lunch stuff for recycling or have a better idea about how to meet that goal anyway.

Staff meetings can be life savers that keep the school's program on its toes. They can also be hotbeds of tension. It may be hard to bring up your peeve about a teacher who talks while you clean up. It may be scary to admit you only know three songs to sing with the children and you dread losing control if you let them stand up and move to music.

Remember that our work settings often invoke feelings we first developed in the families we grew up in. Do you have early feelings of being ignored, bullied or demeaned? Maybe you have feelings of being very conscientious and good. Maybe you didn't speak up in your first family and you have to learn to speak up in this work family.

Directors find that some employees are so resistant to suggestions or directions that they feel they are dealing with adolescent rebellion, mutiny, or just plain ill will. They may want to say "Lead, follow or get out of the way!"

It's wonderful for a center when staff members are willing to take suggestions and are invested enough in the program to bring up problems when there are some and help solve them besides.

Some employees are so willing to see that the right thing gets done that they are constantly letting directors know what the problems are, all day long. One director took care of her endless interruptions from some of the teachers by telling the staff: "You can tell me any problem you have during the day, if you suggest three solutions for the problem." It cuts down on interruptions.

When a program is obliged to control employees with written notices, it can be a real test of one's self esteem and ability to act like an adult. "Sign here. I had to write you up for being late three times this week," a director might say. It's hard to get traffic tickets too, but it happens. Employees who say they are sorry and try to do the right thing, are a joy to work with. Directors who act like traffic cops are tough to live with.

It's good when directors can bring resource people to staff meetings to help where help is needed. It is great when they work fast to get supplies you need, talk with parents that won't listen to you, find out why a child is troublesome and notice that you are doing more than your share of the work. Directors can use staff meetings to let you know what makes a child mean, how much a parent needs your sympathy or tell you how many compliments you got from parents passing through the office to pay their tuition.

Staff meetings can be life savers that keep the school's program on it's toes.

When you don't have these things, can you lead the way to get them? Participate in a way that moves things forward and be glad you aren't a helpless child anymore. Staff meetings iron the wrinkles out of things so they can go more smoothly—until the next crop of problems come up.

Is In-Service Jail Service?

Once teachers were just nagged to go to workshops and conferences. Now there are classes in CPR, health education and first aid that are required by law.

Working with children 8 hours a day makes recreation and rest a real requirement. In spite of this, teachers go home to families and new work period starts. Or they go off to school, and they have to stay awake in classes. If only preschool teachers could have those nap times the children often don't want.

Still, directors let you know about every meeting that comes along. They may even make your employment dependent on your going to some of them. Cheer up. "In-service" as these meetings are called, are a lot like jumping into cold water. You get used to it and feel so good that you did it afterwards.

If caring for young children were easier, maybe more women would be doing it. It gets easier with experience. You can be 20 years old and handle seven two year olds with more skill and ease than a mother of 35 who is raising her first child.

Preschool work gets easier with more know-how. Conferences put on by the National, State or local Association for the Education of Young Children are the best waters to jump into. People who have been in the classrooms and talk simple language give teachers ideas they need—and there's no test at the end.

If children's fights are driving you crazy, there's always a workshop on discipline, peace, or helping children settle arguments.

If you are shy about music or need more ideas about crafts, you can get them.

Directors can learn about how to work with staff better, get fund raising ideas, and buy you the latest puppets for the classroom.

The vendors who come to these conferences give you all kinds of ideas about what to ask for when new supplies are being ordered. They give out free candy, let you try new art products and sell their samples cheaper at the end of the conference. They also have raffles.

Conferences can leave you being proud to be in a profession that is so essential, yet finds you with paint under your nails and sand in your shoes at the end of the day. The people you meet doing workshops and attending them are usually smart, skilled, capable and willing to share.

In-service helps you to be a better teacher, one who is smart, skilled and capable. Always dive in.

So You Want To Be A Director?

Lots of preschool teachers want to be a director. Not so many know what it takes to do this job. The easy part may be getting the coursework that is required by the state you live in. Sometimes it's only a few more units than it takes to be a teacher. Sometimes it is a BA degree, but more is needed.

Seeing that your center has a good program for children is your first priority. You will want to get out into your program and see teachers doing the best job they can do and you will want to know the children yourself, but somewhere between the office and this goal most directors find the phone rings. Life is truly what happens in between making plans to do something else.

A director spends a lot of time answering the phone. Parents have things to talk about. There are calls asking about enrollments and someone wants to sell you something daily. It may feel good to be so important or it may get overwhelming fast.

To be a director, a person needs stamina. The ability to take discomfort and hang in there is essential.

If you love working with little children you may not love doing office work. Even if you are a director who has someone else who figures out the time cards and pays the teachers and the payroll taxes, you have to organize the school's calendar. You need to know how much money it takes to buy your supplies and who to buy them from.

Maybe there is another office at your facility that purchases the liability insurance or the children's accident insurance, but you need to know about it as well.

A directors first job is the safety of children, so he or she needs to get out of the office, hard as it may be, to see that fire bells and fire extinguishers work and earthquake kits are stored, cubbies are cleaned and hands are washed, the toilets were cleaned and the trash is not overflowing, no playground equipment is broken and the gates are secure.

Directors hire staff to work with children and do other chores. That means there are written job descriptions. There are staff meetings to talk about problems and there are annual evaluations to let staff know they are appreciated as well as areas in which they can grow.

One of the hardest parts of being a director is to direct staff. Invariably, one teacher is not getting along with another one at one time or another. A director needs to have good mediation skills and a firm resolve that the children come first. A director may need to learn, just as teachers need to learn. Maybe it is more effective to lighten up and joke more. Maybe it is imperative to be firm and have the courage to write down exactly what needs to be improved and when, for a teacher who is not helping the program.

Hiring and firing staff takes know how and the willingness to tolerate not being loved. It's part of that ability to take hardship that is needed for this tough job.

Lots of preschool teachers want to be a director.
Not so many know what it takes to do this job.

Having been a good and versatile teacher is the best preparation for managing staff. If you have never changed diapers and worked with two year olds, how can you hire a good person for little ones who might bite, bickering as best as best as they can with the few words they know. If you have never worked with lively four year olds, how can you know if a candidate will be able to get them to circle time without having a nervous breakdown? Sometimes the desire to be a director needs to wait until there has been lots of experience with children.

Relationships with parents can be satisfying and discouraging. Some parents are grateful for your efforts in running your program, others want it custom designed for their needs. When enrollments are low, it can be hard to remain true to principles. But every school has a school philosophy that is printed on its handouts for the public to see. This is a mission statement a director is obligated to carry out.

Conferences with parents usually straighten out problems that arise. Sometimes directors hear stories that make them want to cry and they can't even share them with the staff who must care for a child who is acting the way he or she does for understandable reasons. Directors who are continually open to learning more about human development become people who enable others to grow.

It's the director who receives the tearful good bye hugs and the letters that say how grateful good parents are for good care. Being a director often tugs at your heart. It makes up for the hard parts.

One of the hardest is asking for money! People go into child care wanting to be helpful A new director may find it hard the first time tuition is overdue—and then overdue the next month as well. It's important to learn fast. Teachers cannot get paid and bills cannot be met, if tuition payments seem optional for people using child care services.

It helps to remember that banks that hold mortgages do not wait for payments, they level fines. Landlords, department stores, utility companies and credit card companies all expect payments and have monetary consequences if bills are not paid. People using child care should have a clearly written policy about payments and refunds given them when entering a preschool. It's the director's job to see that the plan gets carried out. Sometimes she may give scholarships or discounts, but it's bad news to be careless or timid about collecting the income.

> If you have never worked with lively four year olds, how can you know if a candidate will be able to get them to circle time without having a nervous breakdown?

Directors may or may not have written the school's handbook, or the teacher's handbook, but they all must have the skills to do typing or word processing, use a computer and not be afraid of the technology that surrounds any office these days. Here is a check list of skills to think about if you want to be a director:

- Stamina. The ability to withstand emotional and physical discomfort
- Experience working with children of all ages
- A determination to be in daily touch with how the program is operating
- A facility or understanding of office management such as payroll and purchases such as insurance
- Constant concern with what it takes to maintain safe procedures and a safe environment
- Skills for handling disputes between adults
- Fearless about collecting money
- Writing and word processing skills
- Integrity about the school's mission

If you really want to be a director you'll have a full work schedule and a full heart. It's worth it.

Help! My School Family Is My Real Family!

Is your director ever late with a pay check or stingy about complements? Its certainly normal to get miffed about being neglected like this. Often times, things that bother us in the workplace get to be bigger and bigger issues. It's normal and it's a chance to grow up!

Industrial psychologists will tell you that a work situation will mimic your first family situation. How your mother or father told you what to do and how you reacted may still be affecting your feelings about things. How your brothers or sisters, your first teacher or your older relatives treated you may still be with you.

If you are having a miserable time getting along at work, this is worth examining. If we don't do things like this, then we look to other teachers to agree with us that a director is a tyrant, or incompetent, that a teacher is overly controlling or beyond learning anything. We miss a chance to know how our family affected us and to grow out of it.

Good experiences in our first families can cause trouble as well. Maybe you were the is the trusted oldest child who got to make a lot of decisions. If you have a director who wants you to just follow orders, or if the director is intimidated by your abilities, it can be a shock to your expectations about how the world treats you.

Then again, some psychologists are finding that people are happier at work than they are in their current families. Family life can be stressful with many conflicts that never get ironed out. There are few coffee breaks at home. At work, there may be less stress, more compatible companionship, a coffee break and a lunch break. You even get a paycheck.

Whenever something makes you miserable in a work family or a home family, a good way to handle the situation is to do the following: Be neutral about a conflict by just repeating what is happening.

> On the way home from work, do some self assessment. Ask yourself, how old do you feel?

For example, a fellow teacher is always miffed because you don't come on the yard when she wants you to. Reflect her feelings without judgment. "I'm sorry about being late. I know it's hard that I didn't get here at 9:00." On the way home from work, do some self assessment. Ask yourself, how old do you feel? Is it age ten, when you didn't get the praise your sister got for doing things? Is it age 12 when your parents divorced and you had to share weekends with a step sister?

This type of self-examination is hard to do. No wonder so many of us just find a kindred soul to vent our feelings with. However, another thing we can think about on the way home from work is the model we are for the children we care for. When children see adults getting along, the more likely they are to learn to get along as well.

In the children's families there are tensions that they must live with. If the teachers who care for them are truly intent on growing and learning how to get along with fellow staff members, it enriches many lives. Teachers can set good examples. They can learn from their own past childhood and create a better family for themselvs and others at work.

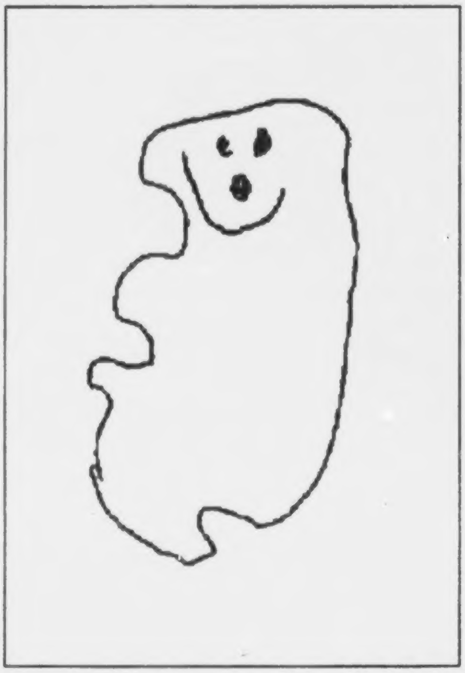
What A Good Director Wants of You

It's hard to find competent, caring employees for a child care center. Sometimes a director finds such a person and he or she doesn't have any units in child development! If you have all the requirements needed for a person who cares for children and teaches them, you are a valuable asset to the field of early childhood education.

Do long fingernails seem important to you?

But do you know how candidates for jobs in child care sometimes ruin things? Here are some things that good directors want from good teachers:

- If you interview for a job, keep in touch afterwards. If a director is desperate to hire someone and you are playing phone tag or seen to have disappeared, it is unfair to a child care center. If you are comparing job offers, it's good to say that. You might even get a higher wage offer by doing this.



- Come dressed as you would for work. That means informal clean clothes, but no jeans or sneakers. Do long nails seem important to you? A director may wonder how you expect to roll clay into balls or make sand cakes with children.

- Bring proof that you have all of the units necessary to work in child care.

- Be willing to try out without being paid. Offer to do a circle time with the children A director can't make this a condition of your employment, but you save yourself and the center some grief, if it's clear right away what your level of competence is. If you are shy or know you need more experience, say so, but offer to learn from others and to be willing to go to conferences and workshops to get more skills. Directors love people who are willing to learn.

- If you accept a job, but get another better offer later, have the courage and courtesy to phone and explain this. You will leave a reputation behind you that you should feel good about, if you meet the director again sometime and perhaps need a new job.

Sometimes directors hire people that never show up, or people who come and get to know the children, then leave in a week or two. This is so hard on children. Child care centers need all the good people they can get and you can be one of them.

Leaving A Center

For the sake of children, many good teachers stay in places that do things that are not right for children. It is painful to hear children demeaned, or ignored or made to do things that are too hard for them to do. Unfortunately, there are many facilities that are run and staffed by people who should not do the important work of child care.

But if you are in a center like this, what happens to the children that are attached to you, children who you protect and whose self image you try to save from degrading remarks and policeman-like management?

In every city there is likely to be a Resource and Referral Service that can advise you what to do. Phone the city hall to find out about them. If exposing the center to public scrutiny means you must leave your job, they may help you find another one. It's hard to take a stand for children and it's hard to abandon them. If you are taking coursework at a college or university, a conference with your instructor may give you some guidance as well.

> If it is ruining your life to work under conditions that are emotionally harmful to children, you may have to leave.

If it is ruining your life to work under conditions that are emotionally harmful to children, you may have to leave. When teachers must go, children should know that they did not do anything wrong. Giving children a fond good bye and letting them know you will always remember them, is a must.

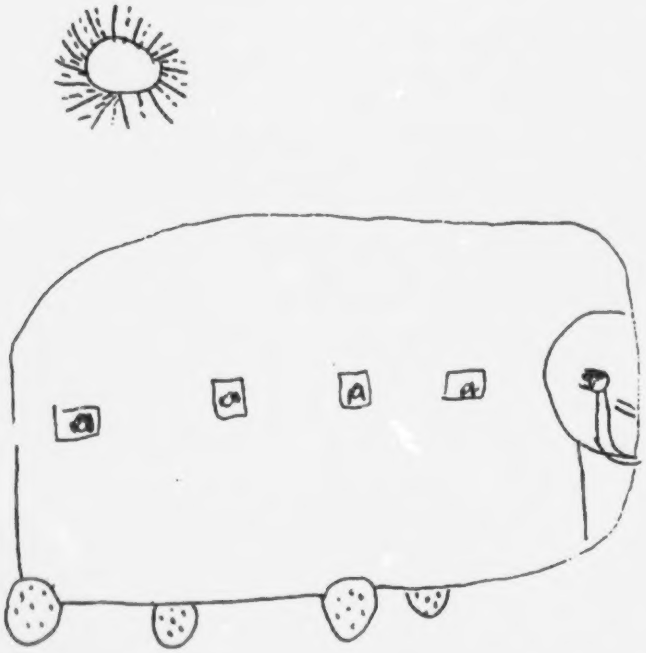
Take comfort in the fact that the care you gave the children will remain with them always. You may have shown them ways of being that they will repeat to children when they are grown.

For one's personal sake, some teachers have to leave good centers. Maybe there have been conflicts with the director, or other teachers or with the pay scale. Maybe the work is too difficult or you are moving. In any event, parents and children need to know that they were important to you. Leaving a good feeling behind you will keep you from carrying a an uneasy burden of anger or regret, if you are leaving for negative reasons. Letting the director know why you want to leave is helpful to the center. Maybe she will improve, or maybe you will improve in your next position.

Good schools give annual evaluations. Your best one should go with you to the next job you apply for. Maybe you have thank you notes that parents sent you, maybe you have copies of newsletters you wrote, or a planning chart that worked especially well.

Each job a teacher has teaches her something. One thing to know is that if an employer asks an old employer for a reference, it is standard procedure for them to give a minimum amount of information—how long you worked and what your job description was. Employers worry that if they cause you not to get a job by telling your faults, you may sue them. They also worry that if they don't warn the next employer of an employee's faults, that person will sue them.

If teachers leave a school on good terms, it can have many positive effects. There can be a staff good-bye party, parents expressions of sadness, children's hugs and everyone's strengthened ability to survive losses and changes. In a long career in child care there may be every kind of leave taking possible for you, and something to learn from each one.



Being the Director of a Small Propriatary School

Anyone who becomes a child care worker has a little piece of Sister Mary Theresa in her or him because caring for and teaching young children takes the kind of love and humility that she had.

When we have skills with working with children it is easy to love the child who is crying for his mother and is comforted when we pick him up and hold him. It's wonderful to see children learn to put away lunch boxes, get the concept of taking turns instead of coming onto the play yard like a terrorist, or to hear a parent say, my child is talking so much better now.

But we also have to love or be committed to the four year old child who says "Tommorrow I'm going to hit you in the eye, poo poo head." We also stay committed when we work with a attention deficit syndrome child who is flailing around in a temper tamtrum because his medication wore off. We don't walk away. We stay committed because we love being there for children in their early years when they are learning so much that will last them a lifetime.

Some people even commit their money or property to children. If you are one of those people who will someday buy your own school, it's good to know the skills you need alongside the compassion you have. Here they are:

Accounting skills:
How much money do you need to take in to meet your basic expenses? Do you know what your basic expenses are? (Rent-salaries-payroll taxes-city taxes-liability insurance-maintenance-supplies,utilities etc.)

Computer skills:
Can you do word processing to type a letter, write the school newsletter, or manage a program that takes care of school records of tuition and enrollments?

Business sense:
If you want to buy a school or buy a building do you have enough money? Do you know where to get a loan and have the collateral that the lenders need to give you a loan?

Teaching competence and experience:
To hire teachers, do you know what skills and attitudes are needed for a teacher of each age group because you have worked with these groups as well?

Motivation to keep learning:
Do you know and belong to organizations that will increase the knowledge you need to function as a business and an early child care educator? The National Association for the Education of Young Children, Chamber of Commerce, and director's groups are examples of groups that could be important to you.

High emotional IQ:
Can you work with teachers, parents, grandparents, salespeople, social workers and all government officials with increasing ease?

Resourcefulness:
Do you know, or are you willing to learn about how things work in a building and on the grounds— such as intercoms and sprinker systems?

Marketing sense:
Do you know how to "sell" your child care center in four minutes on the phone. How to make attractive signs, ads and newsletters?

Legal knowledge:
Are you willing to read, understand and live by the education laws of your state?

Sophistication:
Are you aware of the community and the world that you are in, so that your goals meet the needs of the children you will be preparing for school and life?

Personal mission:
Do you understand your reason for doing the work you will do with children, parents and teachers? Do you have the love and humility it takes to stick with it? A small propietary school that you buy or that you direct can provide you with rewarding experiences in humanitarian work, but it is still a business.

Part II
Hard Times with Parents

Helping Parents to Drop Off Children

It is early in the morning . Pablo clings to his mother in desperation and you are required to disentangle him so she won't be late to work. Jenny sits in the corner, her loud cries have subsided to dismal sobs. Joey is angrily banging the play dough and you wonder if he will put it on the floor and step on it so you will have to scrape it up. Children pour into the room with their parents and can't hear your greeting because Pablo is now screaming in your ear and wiggling to run after his mother. If the children were adults you would think you were in a mental hospital. In a sense you are. You are the one caring for human beings in a crisis.

Among the kind and important things that a preschool teacher should learn is how to help children separate from their parents. If a school has a good separation plan, children will get stronger from overcoming the crisis of leaving home to trust the school. If no care is taken, a child's trust in the world and his or her feelings of self worth can be changed forever.

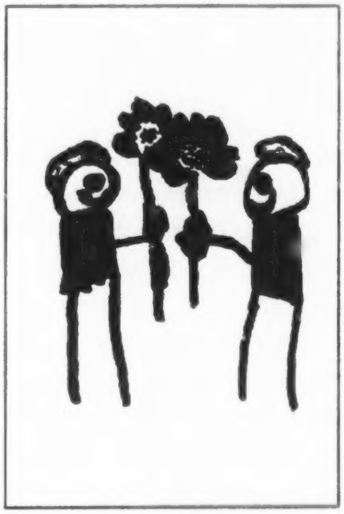
Some schools have no separation plan, but teachers should have theirs. It begins with understanding the desperate fear that the young child has of being abandoned. That fear can take the form of anger (cleaning up playdough may be the mildest of results), quiet sadness, or visible grieving. It's fortunate when a mother understands her child's difficult job and will participate in these good ideas that you can give her if she hasn't thought of them already.

Tell the parent to:

- Bring a picture of herself or himself for the child to hold or have in the cubby. (*See, mommy still exists, even though she is gone.)*

- Invite the teacher to the house for a short visit, or take a picture of the teacher home. (*I like this person and trust her, so can you.)*

- Leave the child's blanket or comfort toy at school. (*It should be labeled with the child's name, and if it is troublesome and isn't helping with the adjustment, the child should leave it in the cubby and only have it at naptime.*



If a parent resists facing a child's particular expression of sorrow at separation, or seeming indifferance, a teacher needs all the good words she can use to help the child. "It makes you mad when mommy leaves, I know it's tough. But she still wants you to learn to do the right things, so she wants me to get you to stop throwing playdough. But I see how hurt you are."

Teachers can ask the adjusted children, "Will your mommy come back?" They say, "yes."

Children notice the teacher's attitudes when a child is crying. They, too, can learn to be empathetic when someone is hurting. Everyone is learning something by the way a teacher behaves when children are in a crisis.

Understanding that very young children (the twos and under) really think that if the mother is gone she is gone for good, makes your job clearer. Some children need to be told to yell after mom has driven away as loudly as they can, "You come back. You come back." If children have the same teacher each day and the same children in their group and the same routine, they will adjust in time, some faster than others. The wise, kind teacher feels for their pain and anger and knows not to ignore it.

Some schools have no separation plan, but teachers should have theirs.

Older children know the parent will come back, but hate the transition from home to school.

When new children come to the child care center as though it is just what they have been looking for all their lives, jump in and have a ball, it is such a blessing. But watch out, after the newness of the toys and activities wears off, the separation sadness may set in. It's a good idea to let parents know that they might arrange to stay with the child an hour or so in two weeks time.

Leaving a child at preschool in the morning goes better if parents create a good-bye ritual such as:

- I'll honk from the car 3 times when I leave
- I'll blow two kisses from the window
- I'll work two puzzles with you before I go
- I'll push you on the swing while I count to 100 before I go

Bad rituals can get started as well. Once a child is adjusted to school, it's best not to hang around waiting for the child's permission to leave. They won't stop being cranky if they know a parent will stay as long as they are upset. It's hard on the parent and the child.

It's hard for the teacher to say this, so good schools have separation plans that spell this out for parents, and directors who might help the parent to understand it. When we are really wise teachers we see the parent's need in this as well. It may be hard to see a child getting so independent that he or she doesn't need the parent anymore.

Parents who treat the stay in child care as a prison sentence and their work as drudgery, are another matter. Children have fun in school and it costs the parent a lot of money. Why not have the attitude that a day at school and a day at work are worthwhile?

Learning to separate from parents to spend the day learning things and being with other children is enriching. It's learned better when teachers are smart about the process.

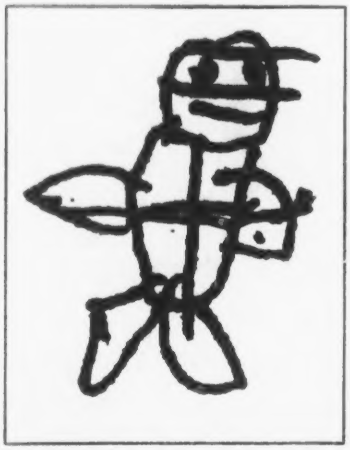
School Family vs. Gym Space

Joining a child care center is not like joining a gym, where you may or may not interact with other people, but some parents treat the experience the same way. "Don't let my child be in the room with that boy," a parent might say.

It's true, some parents miss the point of preschool. Getting to know other children and learning to get along with them and enjoy them is such an important part of their learning.

Teachers notice that children who have been great enemies at first, have many fights, arguments and name calling sessions but often wind up in a close alliance. Children learn through interacting with each other how to get along.

Teachers can help this process by often having children do things as partners. "You and Edna take the snack out today," you may say to a boy and a new girl named Edna. If children balk at this, don't force it, but look for other opportunities to encourage experiences with other children. Circle time is a great place to do it "Switch seats." There may be grumpy faces, but the children most attached to one friend are then sharing themselves with someone else who may feel left out and want to be included. When children form strong friendships, it can be hard on other children who have not developed this kind of support system for themselves. It also makes those close kids unavailable to the others. Understand what every child needs and act with courtesy toward their feelings.



Teachers often wish parents understood this. If a child seems like a bully to a parent, the safest thing for a child is to invite the bully over to play for a few hours Saturday morning! It gives the parent time to take a good look at the child by providing a good play experience and a good food treat. Getting to know the parent and child makes the preschool experience less like renting a locker in a gym and more like a school family.

Even if such an invitation doesn't create a friendship, it creates good will and let's children know that people in groups can be trustworthy or at least managed.

Parents at Risk

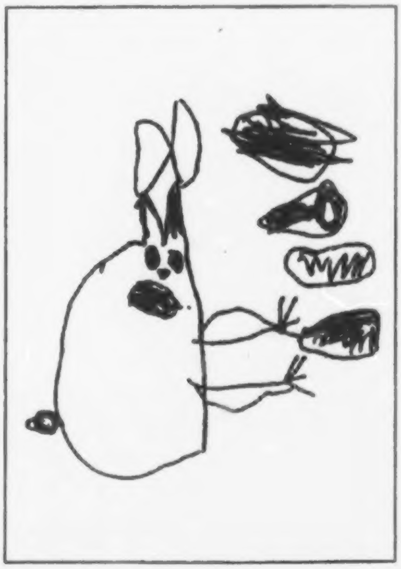
People who work in child care centers are found at many economic levels and many levels of life stress. Some have a spouse whose salary supplements what they get paid, some are students working part time, juggling work and studies, some may even be career teachers who are paid a respectable wage. But everyone caring for young children works in a field that is a high risk job.

We risk getting the flu, colds, pink eye, head lice, HIV and the chicken pox. Sometimes we get bitten and we always get sand in our shoes and paint on our clothes. No wonder getting dumped on by a parent because you don't know where a child's lunch box or jacket went can seem very ungrateful at pick up time. Still, it's important to take a look at the problems of parents—continuously.

> Sometimes we get bitten and we always get sand in our shoes and paint on our clothes.

Maybe your director can't tell you who is in the middle of a divorce, who lost a job, who is having worse than average marital problems or who has someone in the family that needs a 12 step program for one addiction or another. A parent may want to let you know he or she got up three times during the night, but she is usually too rushed to get to work. Taking care of young children means taking part in a family's life. Child care workers are parts of an extended family system even if no one says this or likes this. The children in this family reflect what is happening to the adults who care for them.

Often we just don't know the stresses that parents are having. But the children let you know. A child may get cranky or aggressive. A child may be argumentative and resist taking directions and not have any good will toward anyone. If they aren't getting physically sick, they are often emotionally hurt. Besides setting limits for children who are being troublesome, we need to set aside time for doing some listening. This is one of the reasons that a preschool teacher should sit and have lunch with her group of children. It's one of the reasons she should be in the room when naptime starts.



When children's physical needs are being met, a teacher can show she cares about a child's emotional needs, as well as his or her behavior.

At lunch time, the comment, "Oh, your mommy made you a sandwich today," might elicit some information. At naptime, "Let me read you a story, or let me rub your back," may be just the attention a child needs to trust you enough to complain about something that is happening at home. A wise teacher says something that helps the child. "Oh that's tough on you. I'm so glad you're here so we can help you and your family by taking care of you."

Preschool teachers have many personal risks in working with children, but none of us wants to risk passing up a chance to help a child feel secure when parents are having troubles.

Getting Picked On at Pick Up Time

Most parents are grateful that child care facilities exist. Parents of young children need lots of help and you have probably been giving it all day. Teachers pull out tricycles, get out toys, tie shoe laces, wipe noses, zip zippers and open dozens of juice containers that are not user friendly. The end of the day finds you tired from doing knee bends and ready to say good-bye to the bustling children. That's why it can get teachers down when a parent comes at closing time with an attitude that is anything but grateful.

"Where is his jacket?"
"Why didn't she eat any of her lunch?"
"How did this child get so dirty?"

Maybe it's the freeway traffic. An angry parent can make a teacher's heart race, just as she's preparing to race home. No one wants to lose an enrollment over a lost jacket, especially since you may have retrieved it more than once that day and it probably doesn't have a name on it so that the new aide could help you find it.

Pick up time demands some cool thinking as closing time draws near. It's good to remember things like these:

A parent is a client who is paying your wages. Be businesslike and remember it takes two to make a fight. Make nice instead. You may say something like this: "I can't leave the children to help you look for it, but our school procedure is to leave jackets in——. I'll leave a note for the director that we need to track it down for you tomorrow." Most schools have old lost and found jackets that can be borrowed.

Parking lots charge for the time a car was parked.

Parents who complain about opening a full lunch box may have spent the day confident that the good foods they packed for the child would be appreciated while they were separated. It seems like carelessness or rejection to them to find it untouched. If the child wasn't hungry, or got fed from someone else's lunch, you might point out that there are two snacks offered daily. Empathize: "I know you always pack such good foods." Caring centers don't dump good foods a child doesn't eat, but let the parent see what happened to the lunch.

Parents who worry about a preschool child staying clean during the day won't seem like such a pain if you try to understand the feelings such people may have about clothing. Some parents don't see messing with mud or paints as exploration of materials that is a part of experimentation and learning. They may associate dirt with disease or poverty or have spent a great deal of money to present their child to you attractively. If you are educated enough about early childhood education to understand appropriate preschool activities, explain the paint stains with conviction, or be sympathetic. "Children learn best when they are not anxious — can she wear old play clothes to school?"

When parents have serious disagreements about a matter at school, teachers should be careful to report things to the director.

Crankiness at pick up time may be generated from a parent knowing that they are late and will have to pay the late fee. It's tempting to be a softy for the sake of public relations, but is it fair to forgive late fees? Parking lots charge for the time a car was parked.

If child care people want to stay in business they have to be business-like. Remember the freeway traffic can make you mad too and parents are mostly grateful to you for your care and knowledge.

When Parents Hit Your Kids at Home

There are some things that teachers can't tell parents, but maybe they should. A dad comes in to pick up his child and he angrily asks his daughter where her lunchbox is. The child has looked forward to her father picking her up and has made a picture for him. The box seems so unimportant to the teacher, compared to the child's feelings. "Oh, that's my fault, I have to help her learn where it goes," a kind teacher may say. Maybe the child needs to learn to put things where they belong, and to measure up to the expectations of a rushed and impatient parent.

Some teachers learn that children are spanked at home. If they see any marks on a child, teachers in the United States are obligated to report this to a child abuse hotline. What if parents don't beat children, but discipline by hurting them? "Just give him a good spank if he gives you any lip," a parent may say. It's not only against the law to hit children in child care centers, it is not good sense.

A teacher may be working hard to get a child to care about doing the right thing because it's good for the group and good for the child to learn. She doesn't want to report a child's misbehavior to a parent if there is sure to be a spanking at home. This undermines her work. Sometimes directors need to have conferences with parents and sometimes teachers do.

The best way to handle this is to make lemonade out of the lemons. Ideally, a parent who wants to discipline a child cares a great deal about how the child is turning out. The worst attitude one can have is indifference. The harsh parent needs to hear some of the alternate ways to discipline children, other than to hit. Being the child's advocate, rather than jailer, is one of them. "Kids don't listen to people they don't like. We want our children here to behave the same way when we are out of the room as they behave when we are in the room. It will happen in time, because they like how it feels to have our approval, or to have things go smoothly, or because they are so interested in learning. If they only mind because we are like a policeman watching them, what happens to children who have freedom in junior high school where there is less supervision? "Children will take rules into themselves if we teach with love and consideration, not with anger."

> If parents are having a hard time with a child, you probably are too.

Parents may resist ideas that seem hard and may want to stick to "that's how I was raised and it didn't hurt me." It's a test of your ability to express ideas about human development, and make lemonade at the same time. Sweeten any conference with letting parents know how a child may have bragged about them, may have inherited a good physical feature of theirs, or has a natural gift in certain areas.

If parents are having a hard time with a child, you probably are too. You can sympathize and let a parent know it's hard for you as well. Convey that you are working together, not preaching or criticizing.

Sometimes what seems harsh to a teacher may just be a difference in family behaviors. It becomes clear, when working with a bunch of children, which ones are affectionate and which don't like or need hugs. Some children want verbal interactions, especially older children who only tolerate hugs once in a while. That's why it's a good idea to say "May I hug you?" or "May I pick you up?" before comforting a child physically.

Helping children measure up to the expectations of their families as well as their group at school takes a lot of skill and patience. A preschool teacher often works like a psychologist and sociologist, as well as a teacher, but she can't tell parents that.

Some Things Parents Won't Tell You

"I just love this school" a parent may tell you on the way out the gate with her paint-splattered little one. "He's such a great dad," you might remark to your director, as a dad disentangles himself from his child to get to work early one morning. It's true that when children have adjusted to a child care center and have been in the school family for a while, parents and teachers have many good feelings about what they are doing together to care for young children. Still, there are rough moments.

A teacher may forget to give a child his medicine, or forget to write a note explaining what happened underneath a band aid on the knee one day. A director may have gotten a bill mixed up, or spelled a child's name wrong. A grandmother may ask why her grandchild is not in the *other* nice teacher's room. These are events that get out in the open and can be handled one way or another, until things are peaceful again, but there are some things parents say that teachers don't hear. The director hopes other parents don't hear them at a child's birthday party or in the school parking lot.

A good preschool provides a means for parents to contact each other for the general good of all, so it seems unfair when there is gossip.

It's natural for adults to feel shy about complaining about teachers. In some places there are not enough schools and getting an enrollment is a lucky break. To see the director about a teacher's personality, or a procedure they don't like may make the parent feel he or she is risking her child's spot. Others are just in the same place that some children are in, when teachers have to say, "Use your words. You don't have to let him do that to you!" A parent who sees children sitting on a cold bench for snack, while teachers stand by bundled up have every right to ask if there are some blankets children can put under their bottoms.

A conference with the director about harsh words a parent heard coming from a teacher's mouth may clarify a lot about what happens when children live in groups that adults have to manage daily "No one wants to be judged by one brief moment in history," is an old defense for the classroom teacher. "Let's find out what happened before she bellowed like that and what happened afterwards," a good director might say. If an employee is often behaving in a way that is not appropriate around young children, the director may be happy to have the observation of a parent to help her correct things with the staff member. Still, there's no stopping negative gossip. Do teachers also mumble to each other about which parent never knows when the field trip will take place? Do they roll up their eyes about the mother who drags in after circle time each, day and wants to know why the child is shy about joining the group?

The best teachers can do is to be brave themselves about keeping open communications. "Is there anything you want to ask me?" A teacher might say. She can't leave her group for a conference, but she can suggest a meeting with the director and prepare the director for what trouble she thinks is brewing.

The best teachers can do, is to be brave themselves about keeping open communications.

If a teacher knows someone looked at her out of the corner of her eye when she was having a bad day, she might even bring up the subject herself. " I was pretty loud with the group the other day. Did your child feel intimidated? We have these moments...," she might say. A parent's response is often surprising, and talking always clears the air.

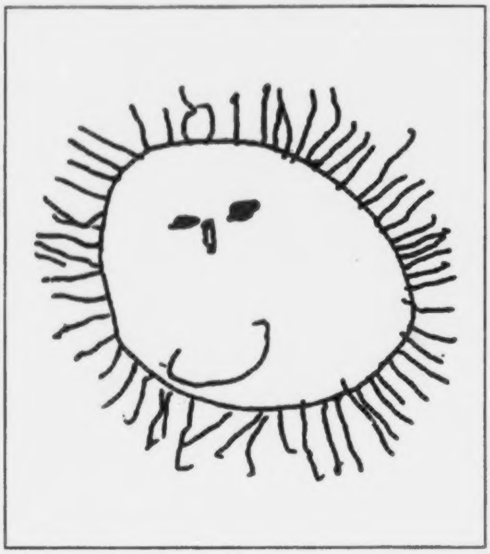
Teachers who are not parents may not know, if no one tells them, what stresses are upon parents of young children. If a child has a long nap, they often don't go to bed until late, and tired parents have no time for themselves, the laundry, the kitchen cleanup, and the communication needed with other adults.

Young children are often up at night. Do a lesson about sleeping in your own bed at night. Ask the children who stayed in their own beds last night and look at the uneasy faces and the few hands that are raised.

When you find a child's behavior difficult, chances are that parents find the behavior difficult as well. It's often hard for a parent to admit this. Many will want you to be their own idealized version of what they would like to be. After all, you're getting paid and have the qualifications to care for children.

A director can ask, "We wonder if you are having trouble with Joe when we....." It can open the door for mutual help. It can also be a chance for the parent to blame the school. Maybe the last birthday party got parents sharing common grievances and different schools that were available. Some parents remember how hard it is for a child to adjust to a new school. They can't do that with their busy schedule and lack of sleep. It's easier to gossip and takes less time than conferencing.

Sometimes parents can't share deep hurts—how hard it is to leave a child in your care, or leave a child crying. Others don't want to share that they just can't handle things. They need your help desperately. Parents who are having troubles can be ashamed that what they wanted for their children is not working out. Parents may have kept secrets they won't tell you, though every child care center becomes a place that learns of resources for parents. By law, no parent needs to tell you if their child has AIDS. Each child care center must take precautions with gloves when handling nose bleeds or wounds, as though each child is a potential carrier.



Parents may be afraid that you will ask them to leave your center if their child is disruptive. They may not like your place, but are afraid no one else will take their child. Adults often cover their fears and secrets with belligerent behavior, or let some of it hang out at those birthday parties when they can talk with other parents.

Among the hardest things that preschool teachers do, is rising above the difficult parts and remembering how important you are to children. What you do that is good will last a lifetime. To do this, even if you are not appreciated or are perceived unfairly, is noble and giving. And this way of being will last a lifetime for you and the child you care for.

Parents, like anyone else, can dump their feelings on other people. When you are talked to like a waitress, you may wish you could show off a list of the classes you have taken, but it might not do any good. What helps is remembering that it takes two to make a fight and being adult-like and courteous when an adult is being child-like may pay off in the long run. Many grumpy and critical parents of a newly enrolled child will soften up in time. When it's time to leave your program, you may have won them over. If you didn't, you have a chance to know how much stronger you are than before. Doing the right thing in spite of hardship means you have good character. Remember who you really are when someone treats you like someone you are not.

Power Plays

No one likes to feel powerless, yet everyone experiences times when they are in control of things and other times when they are not. Accepting both situations takes some experience in living.

When little children find their words, they try resisting directions and calling the shots. "No, I won't sit down! I go outside!," protests the red faced three year old at circle time.

The mature teacher's aide, whose first language is not English, purses her lips and takes orders not to force children to eat their lunch or to put their lunch boxes away for them. She may have raised five children, but has to follow a school's philosophy about handling children. On weekends she teaches Sunday school. On week days she sweeps and wipes and wonders why they do what they do at her child care center.

The attractive mother in the business suit has a worried look on her face as she pleads with her child to let go of her so she can go to work. She has hung around waiting for her child's permission to go and she isn't getting it. At work, she directs people and things with ease. Leaving her child successfully at child care is confusing.

The teacher in the T-shirt hanging up a wet easel painting knows that a firm resolve to leave with a friendly good bye works best. If children have ambivalent feelings about school, the mother should model that she doesn't. She can show that she knows best. But should a teacher say this to a parent? Will the parent take offense, begin to dislike the teacher for unsolicited help, and then complain about her to the director?

Maybe no one of us knows more than all of us put together in child care.

Very often, the youngest of teachers in a child care center has had more experience with children than any first time parent. Experience tells teachers when children need firm limits and clear directions or when they need hugs and sympathy.

Sometimes teachers are new to child development and parents are experienced and well read. Who should be the one in control of a situation? Learning how to get along and share the power takes time. Like computer work, it can be like watching paint dry.

It's good to reflect on how different things are with children, between teachers and with parents, when they have all been together for a long time. The child who came to a child care center at two years of age and leaves for first grade at five, has grown so much, and so have the adults around him or her.

Accepting the role of the follower or the leader gives us empathy for others. It's tough for the child to give up freedom for conformity until the stories and songs of circle time show him it was worth it.

Aides who will not be taking classes to rise their status in a center get the best kind of hands on learning by being with teachers who have done their course work and reflect it well.

Moms who are all thumbs about certain things, learn by watching and listening to a teacher, just as teachers learn by watching and listening to a parent.

Teachers may write about children in their school newsletters and show that they understand and appreciate the struggles that go along with smoother parent child relations. She may write: "Sylvia is learning that even though it's hard to let go of Mommy, it's wonderful to get hold of a trike at school. Good work with learning about those morning separations, Sylvia and Mom!"

Maybe no one of us knows more than all of us put together in child care.

Ways to Help Parents

Teachers know all sorts of ways that parents could help them as they care for children all day long. And teachers should know the ways they can help parents.

Teachers wish parents would mark children's clothes and belongings. When a blanket drops on the floor during naptime, how does the aide know who it belongs to as she puts away the cots? Every school seems to have what amounts to a haystack of lost clothing, lunch boxes, shoes, sharing toys and food containers. For the cost of a pernament marker, parents could save a bunch of bucks.

> No one can argue with experience and teachers usually have a lot of it.

Teachers wish parents would send a spoon or fork along with the lunch. Some wish parents would not pack small juice containers. Not only do they not decompose in the lanldill, the straws they come with are not user friendly. It takes time or scissors (not teeth we hope) to get the paper off of a simple little straw to sick in the juice box's hole. What ever happened to putting milk or juice into a thermos—one with the child's name on it?

Directors, too, know how parents could help them. Reading the fine print on the enrollment form might mean tuition would come in on time and there would be no hard feelings about late fees. They wish everyone took time to read the newsletter so they would know there was field trip, parent's meeting, or a Halloween parade.

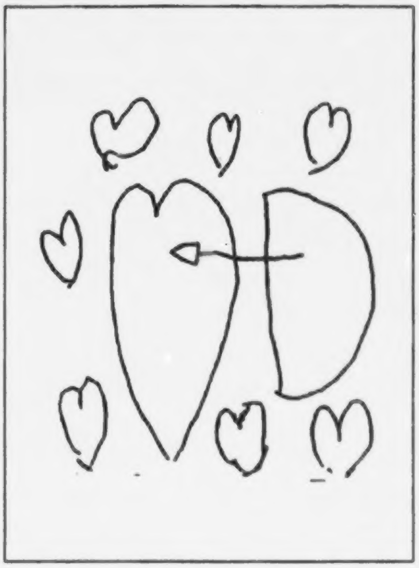
But what kind of help do parents need from a staff? Sure, it's lucky that there are people who want to work in child care facilities. The work is hard even in the best financially endowed schools. The wages are not what most people could earn as a checker in a market. But besides a teacher's commitment to children parents need lots of reassurance — the kind that child care workers can give.

A teacher, an aide, a director, sees a child in a group of other children. They know if children are aggressive or shy, helpful or stubborn, charming or argumentative. They know these things are normal for a group and children are learning. It is both kind and helpful when a staff member reassures parents that things are normal, that children are growing and learning. Most parents adore their children and think they are wonderful. Hard as it is to care for kids, seeing what is wonderful about each one and letting parents know you see it, is an important part of early childhood work.

There are times when parents seem rejecting of children's behavior that teachers know is just part of a child's natural growing up.

Children stop hitting with fists and start hitting with words. Some start being argumentive, won't sing or talk at circle time and won't be a friend to someone who wants to be a buddy badly. Two year olds stop biting, threes get assertive and four year olds start using truck driver language. Biting and bad language seem to sweep through child care like the measles and then they are gone. Parents need to know what is normal behavior for children.

Whenever a teacher wants to reassure a parent that her child's growth is on target, it's good to say, "In my experience most children will be more interested in painting their picture than keeping their clothes clean. No one can argue with experience and teachers usually have a lot of it..."



Parents need to know you will reassure their children as well. You can tell when a parent and child come to school mad at each other. It's hard to get going in the morning. No wonder things are not labeled with the child's name. You can reassure the child that mom or dad are not mad anymore. "Right now, I'll bet mom is eating her lunch and thinking about you." This is a good thing to say to children at lunch time. Often, children should hear a teacher say. "Your daddy takes such good care of you." Or, "You are such a lucky child to have such good parents."

Teachers have great power in children's minds. Letting them know they are still in their parent's thoughts and hearts even though the family is separated helps to keep the family bonds strong and reduce children's anxiety.

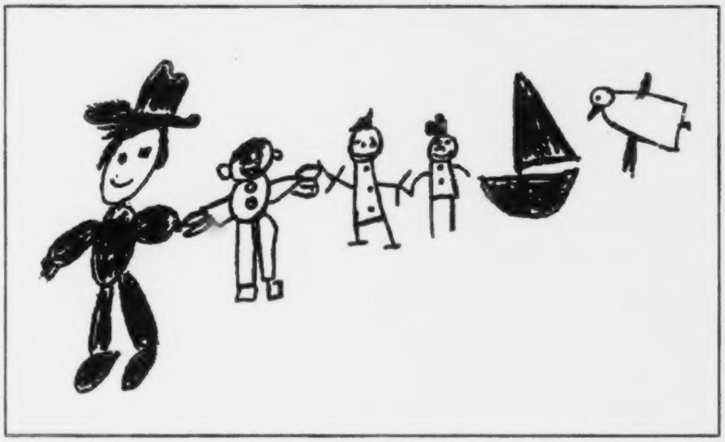
Kind and thoughtful teachers will be remembered for years to come even if parents continue to forget to mark belongings.

When Staff Have Children in School

Child care centers usually need all the good teachers they can get. When a teacher applies for a job and has not only excellent qualifications but also her own child to bring to school, it can be a mixed blessing. Some directors know from experience how hard it is for a young child to share mother with other children. They won't hire a teacher if her child's attendance is part of the employment agreement. Others figure out how to make things work.

The teaching mother need to be willing to relinquish her child to a teacher's care and be supportive of the teacher, as much as she wishes parents of her group of children to be supportive of her.

It's not easy. Often a child will catch sight of his or her mother and wail for her. Anyone who greets children at a gate in the morning knows that it's hard to compete with a parent. Not until parents are gone will children relate to their teacher happily. When mother is near by all day, children can be truly distressed and fail to adjust for their whole preschool stay.



One solution is to establish good rapport between the child's teacher and the child. A home visit, or Saturday lunch date can be arranged. Teacher's picture can go up on the refrigerator and mom can pledge her cooperation to make things work at school as well.

Mothers have to swim up stream to do this, but it's important to let children know that Mommy is a mommy for a certain period of time during the day and she is "at work" during the other times. The director, mother and teacher can determine the best time for the two to have mother-child time, but it is important to relieve the stress that both will feel.

When the mother is genuinely trusting and supportive of the teacher and the teacher empathetic with the stress on the mother-child bond, things go well.

Teachers can feel resentful if the child rejects them and the parent acts like she is rescuing a child when they meet.

A parent can feel anguish if she thinks no one understands how hard it is for her to be torn between wanting to mother and needing to work. A director needs to contend with the real or imagined worries that parents of children in the teacher mother's group have. They may worry that their own children are being slighted by their teacher's need to care for her own child.

The best thing that can happen is for the director, teacher and mother to all care about the success of the plan and to listen to each other's feelings in the matter.

The child will always be having the worst time of it, as young children can't imagine affections going in two directions at once. It's hard to save in one's head the idea that mommy belongs to the child, if she is doing things for others. Conserving one idea and dealing with the other is tough.

It's the consistent routine and the strong commitment of the three adults that make things work out, so that a child care center has the benefit of a good teacher who also happens to be a mother on the grounds.

Some Ways That Parents and Child Care Centers Peeve Each Other

The role of the child care center is to care well for children. Teachers and directors are an intricate part of a child's learning. But parents learn from the experience, just as the school staff does. In general parents and teachers get along well, but there are some traditional things that peeve both parties frequently:

WHAT PEEVES CHILD CARE CENTERS ABOUT PARENTS:

Many parents don't label childen's clothing.

Every preschool has a pile of lost and found clothes as big as a haystack somewhere. Parents can't figure out where Johnnie's socks and shirts went. Teachers can't figure out why parents can't take a marking pen and write the child's last name on things. Even the insides of shoes, and the lid of the thermos could return home (unless they get thrown over the fence).

Parents get mad because little children bite sometimes.

If a teacher could fly across a yard to stop one two year old from gnashing on another, she would do it. When children bite, it's awful for everyone. Biting sweeps through the little one's group like the flu, then dies down. Children with little language but a strong set of teeth learn how to make a big stir. It happens everywhere. Parents can help it go away. If a parent went to a new child care center, her child could be the one that bites.

Parents are horrified that their child got dirty.

Pushing around figures in mathematics has something in common with messing with paint, play dough, clay and mud. Experimenting with things to see what happens is the basis of learning. Life is easier when parents send children to school looking ready for the work of play rather than looking like they are going for a job interview.

Parents come to preschool late, then complain the child is not happy.

Joining a group that has already started, has finished snack and had circle time is tough on a child. Parents who pay attention to a preschool's daily schedule get their money's worth and help children adjust to school sooner.

Parents end a child's enrollment suddenly.

Children get attached to each other and often grieve when a playmate leaves them. Giving a school notice that a child will be leaving gives the teacher time to prepare the children and send the child away with good wishes.

WHAT PEEVES PARENTS ABOUT CHILD CARE CENTERS:

A child gets hurt and no record is made of what happened.

Seeing scratches on a child's back in the bathtub at night can be heartbreaking and enraging at the same time. Parents are entitled to a report about any injury, including how it happened.

A parent comes at pick up time and is told his or her child doesn't mind.

If teachers are having trouble with a child, you can bet the parents are too. If parents knew how to get a child to comply better, they would do it. Teachers and directors need to ask, "Are you having any trouble with Johnny (doing this or that)? A little tact can go a long way to giving parents some good ideas that teachers have about learning to cooperate.

A child says he has no friends.

When children don't have access to their parents during the day, they could at least have some fun with other children. Social adjustment is as important as the ABC's and schools should be ready to let a parent know how a child is getting along, and what the parent and the school can do to help a child with the ins and outs of relationships.

The traffic was terrible and the late charge is worse.

Most schools charge a high fee, by the minute, for parents who hold the school open beyond the closing hour. It's tough when it's not a parent's fault, but chances are good that the teacher is just as tired. She must get home to her own children. Some schools, by law, must not operate after certain hours.

A child's teacher leaves:

It's such a good feeling when your child likes the person who cares for him or her during the day, is learning lots and enjoys preschool. If a teacher leaves, the child has to adjust all over again, to the new teacher. Schools should notify parents in advance and take care to help the children adjust.

Part III
Hard Times with Difficult Children

Who's a Tough Kid?

Tough kids want to be the top banana in a group. They seem to turn deaf when they are punching someone and you are calling for a cease fire. They don't take "no" for an answer and don't answer if you ask them what the rule is about taking turns, using your words and staying on your cot at rest time.

Whew! But if they are four years old they become reasonable five year olds under your care, eventually. If they just have a feisty temperament, they learn something, because you, the teacher, learn so many different things that you can do to divert anger and energy into other areas without labeling the tough ones as bullies or bad guys.

But other kids are tough too. Some examples are: the child who never seems to adjust to school and sobs in a corner about being separated from mom in the morning; the child who is present only in body, but in spirit waits all day for pick up time; the child who doesn't talk or smile; the one who never seems to find a friend; or the one who worries if mom or dad or will pick him up.

It's the tough kids that trigger memories of our own suffering as a child. They make us work harder at understanding what we can do to help children. It's our failures with them that send us to classes and to interview specialists to learn why children act this way and what child care providers can do about it. It's the really difficult children that teach us how powerless we can be and how much we must accept and still go on with the things we can do that will help children.

> It's the tough kids that trigger our memories of our own suffering as a child

Because it takes a long time for a child to grow up, teachers don't often see the results of their work. It's easy to get discouraged. But if a teacher has educated herself to do the best she can with a child in her care, she can have an influence. In foster care, children who are bounced from home to home but have at least one nurturing parent they can relate to have had a chance to experience love and stability. Someday they may make the choice of being like that parent.

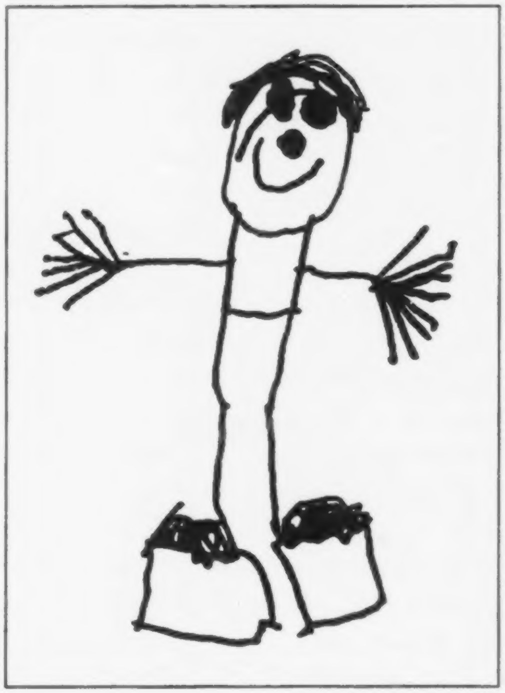
This section gives teachers and aides some ideas about working with all children who have their hard times in life, however long those times may last.

Bullies

Keeping children safe is every preschool's first priority. Never mind that the earthquake kits are in place, the fire extinguishers serviced, the hand washing practice carried out daily and the emergency plans practiced. The children who hurt other children are our constant concern.

There is a tendency for boys to hurt each other physically and girls to hurt each other with words or actions. That means that bully boys usually get the most attention and when we have time, we get to the girls who are being cruel to someone by excluding them from the group or do name calling.

It's a full day's work to police safety. Improving on the traditional things teachers do can be helpful. Here are some ideas:



Use your words:

Teachers tell children to use language for what they want after every smack, tug of war, bite, or push. If it isn't working immediately, teachers should remember that children have a short memory and they learn by repetition. It has to be presented to them continually. However, if a teacher is feeling discouraged, it's best to show by example.

"Here is how I would talk to someone if they grabbed my sweater and threw it away." The teacher puts her arms on her hips, stamps her foot and yells loudly, "I don't want you to do that!" Children are learning much of what they learn these days visually because they watch so much television. Effective teachers have to become actresses.

To a child who is being excluded for no good reason, sit with the child and say, "Here is how I would try to play with those girls. I would take theses little sticks and say "Avon calling! Who wants to buy some lipsticks?" You might even advise her to yell something about being decent to other people, if she has been too timid. Be sure you tell your group what decent behavior means.

Walk away:

When fights are brewing and children's squabbles are getting nowhere, saying "Walk away" to someone who is getting exasperated is good advice. It takes two to fight. Children want to play with each other almost as much as they want to win every encounter for themselves. Sometimes it's a relief to children that tension was broken by someone simply leaving.

The therapeutic time out:

If children are benched or given time-outs continually it is usually a sign of a bankrupt system of discipline. Children see time-outs as a jail sentence and they leave the bench still mad without having learned much of anything. There is high recidivism.

When a child must be taken away from the group for reasons of safety or everyone's sanity, sitting with the child to talk things over is the wisest move. Here are some helpful comments and ideas worth remembering:

> If a teacher is always a bad cop, children learn to avoid her out of fear and they don't learn to take the rules inside of themselves.

You can't talk and get anywhere in the heat of passion. Both teacher and child should settle down before talking. "I'll be back to talk when I'm not so upset and you are not so upset either."

Saying, "What happened before you (hit or did something destructive)?" helps a child have his "day in court" if you did not see what happened or if you want to understand how the child viewed the fracas.

Being a good listener is your best asset as a controller of out of control behaviors. Without judgment in your voice, feed back what a child expresses. "You got your hands on it first and you weren't finished even though you turned away."

Describe what you see. "Your face is so red and there are tears in your eyes and your fists are rolled up. You are really, really upset."

State the facts clearly. "I cannot let children hurt each other. It's my job. It's what parents want me to do. What did you do wrong when you were upset? What will you do the next time?"

Teachers are lucky when bad flare-ups are resolved after they intervene, It usually takes many repetitions of these scenes for children to change their aggressions. Conferencing with the parents helps sometimes because teachers learn more about the family situations. Maybe there are older siblings who settle everything with physical force, or family behaviors of impatience. Maybe hitting and spanking are common. Maybe a child is deeply troubled or should be diagnosed by a neurological pediatrician.

Make a bully sign

If bullying behavior is rampant in the classroom, a teacher can save her voice and make a sign that everyone learns to read: THERE ARE NO BULLIES IN THIS SCHOOL. She explains that a bully gets what he or she wants by force and she makes it clear that it is her job to not allow this. It is the job of children to learn to settle things with words and ideas. When she holds up the sign in front of a child, it might work. It saves her voice anyway. Using sign language to talk with children is another tactic. Signing is fun. For example, the sign for "stop" is a flat hand chopped down on the other flat hand and the face clearly indicating "No!"

Be a good cop or a bad cop:

Being consistent about the limits that are set in a child care center are important. But there is an art to teaching young children. Sometimes a teacher needs to be a bad cop and show she is truly against outrageous behavior, like a group of girls tormenting a newcomer. She must show dramatically that she is upset.

However, if a teacher is always a bad cop, children learn to avoid her out of fear and they don't learn to take the rules inside of themselves.

A good cop understands how tough life is before she lays down the laws and then says, "You'll learn. You've learned so many things already. You'll get this too. I know you will."

Teachers should not be bullied or buffaloed by children's behavior, tough as it is to learn to manage it.

When Children Can't Be Touched

When we study child development we learn how important it is for babies to be held, cuddled, touched and talked to. Infants and young children need their senses stimulated. But what happens to young children who are cared for in places where teachers are told not to touch them?

You may work in a large facility that is very conscious of the lawsuits brought against child care centers by parents who claim that their children were abused or molested in some way. The center reacts in fear and tells teachers that when diapers or clothing are changed, two teachers must be present. No children are to be touched other than for cleaning them up, and they may not be held on laps, picked up, or hugged.

> It is possible to give children the idea that a teacher's role and a parents role are different and they are both important and both satisfying.

Young children who are raised this way in orphanages may be damaged beyond help, or need intensive therapy to learn normal human emotions. But will this lack of touch have an effect on children who go back to their parents at night, after a day of what seems like partial sensory deprivation?

Until there are some studies on this, or policies are more enlightened, a teacher must do what she can for young children. She can use the sense of sound!

With words she can say things like, "You are such a sweet child," or "You are such a great kid. I'll bet your parents love to give you a big hug when they see you." There will be times when children hug their teachers. And even if the adults cannot respond physically, they can respond sensitively with their words. It is possible to give children the idea that a teacher's role and a parent's role are different and they are both important and both satisfying.

Many teachers work in facilities that don't measure up to what they think is best for young children. This is what motivates someone to become a director or owner of a child care facility! It takes a lot of character to remain faithful to the care of children and do the best one can for them in less than ideal situations.

The Ideal Teacher

Most of us spend a lifetime learning how to work, live, and love intelligently, so there's no way anyone is going to be a perfect teacher right off the bat. Still, there are some things a good director looks for in a good teacher. They are skills and qualities that all of us who work with young children can aim for.

The quality of being present

Some staff members seem to have an invisible bumper sticker on their foreheads that reads, "I'd rather be skiing...or sleeping, or seeing my boyfriend, or doing my school homework, or being with my own children." Some people often seem to be waiting for the time clock to release them.

What child care centers need are employees who always wanted to work with young children. They have done their coursework or earned a degree in early childhood, and they want to be where they are and they show it. They are present.

Children are always teaching us about ourselves, just as we are teaching them. We go home wondering why we are so pleased with one child and so upset with another. Does it perhaps have to do with something inside us?

If we are basically introverted, we can learn to be expressive with puppets and music or we'll lose the childrens' attention for sure. If we are extroverted and talkative, we can learn to listen to what children have to say because their impact is original and needs expression too. There is an old saying among supervisors, "The teacher does all of the talking but it's the children that need the language development.

Being right where you want to be, in spite of the flu season, the fights, the dirty diapers and the sticky tables, is real devotion that is lucky for the children in child care.

People who are present in body, mind and spirit are there for the children. They notice a drippy nose needs to be wiped, a picture is hanging askew, sand needs to be swept from the sidewalk and the director is coming and will notice these things if the teacher doesn't. Here is a check list of goals for teachers working toward an ideal:

Sophistication

Sophistication means being worldly wise. It means knowing where the world is going and wanting the children you care for to be prepared for it. Maybe it's an awareness of the world's shrinking arable land, so that you mind if children waste food. Maybe it's learning all you can about giving children good musical experiences because the local school system is broke and going to cut out the music programs. You know that the best learners need music and movement as well as focused attention to academics.

High emotional IQ

Teachers with blank expressions are hard to “read”. If expressing emotions got screened out in one's early life, it's important to get it back again. Parents need to see a teacher's face register contentment, if not pleasure, when their child comes to school. People who have a high emotional IQ get wind of parents who are upset about something and the director better know about it. They can tell when parents are worried and they can be reassuring or helpful. They sense tension between themselves and other teachers and work to straighten things out personally or at staff meetings.

A great way to increase one's expressiveness is to take a basic class in sign-language. The signs are fun to learn, but mean nothing unless you have a face that goes along with the signs like “sad, surprised, sick, ice cream, lion, no, stop, dirty or wow!”

Willingness to stretch oneself

Lots of people say “I can't sing. Few say I'm going to learn how. It's possible to learn to keep a tune, or keep a tape recorder on your lap. It's possible to learn to cook, if you never did before, to learn to mix paint, write and spell better when doing reports or notes to parents. It's possible to learn to care for physically or educationally challenged children, or children in all the age groups. It's really possible to learn to change diapers or work a computer program.

These things just take a willingness to try, not all at once, but when there is a good time for it. Children need the best role models they can get, so the more skillful and accomplished a teacher is, the more they can aspire to in their own lives.

Self knowledge

We are all a mystery to ourselves. Otherwise we might know what our dreams mean, or why a relationship with boyfriend or girlfriend didn't work out or why we can't remember directions or the multiplication table of the 9's.

If we are willing to take quiet time and look inside ourselves, we start knowing why we can't stand another teacher or are frightened by an assertive parent, why we can't ask for a raise or apply for another job somewhere. Teachers who know why they are working in child care have a mission that guides them.

Many good people may see work in child care as a stepping stone to another career. They want to get a degree to work in grade school, or be a pediatrician or marriage, family and child counselor. However short a person's stay in early education might be, it is a long time for the formative stage of a child's life. The ideal teacher has ideals.

Skills

Society doesn't give much credit to preschool teachers, even though there is a bit of Sister Theresa in all of us. But how many people in high paying positions could get 12 to 24 preschool children down a long hallway successfully?

"What you do is like giving a birthday party every day, " an awed parent once said of a preschool teacher. Teachers have to have lots of tricks up their sleeves, like whispering so noisy children will listen, or knowing that a steady drumbeat will slow the wild ones down. Everything works once, but maybe not twice, so a teacher needs to keep filling up those sleeves more and more by attending conferences or classes and learning from other teachers.

Good sense

The most skillful teacher in the world is no use to a child care center if she doesn't know she shouldn't wear seductive clothing to work, that she should eat well and exercise, or understand everything on her pay stub.

We all do dumb things sometimes, but if we don't learn something useful from them, what other people learn about us is harmful. The ideal teacher uses good judgment about handling a parent who comes at pickup time with alcohol on the breath. She knows when to get help from the office or when to handle things without help.

When one is close to being an ideal teacher, maybe it's time to a director.

Is Your Classroom Aide a Third Hand or One Child Too Many?

Everyone who works with young children needs some help. Mothers around 5:00 in the evening need help. They call it the "witching hour" and need a father to come home soon. Fathers need help. Where are the wipettes and can junior have what he's asking for on the top shelf, or can't he? The single parent is an expert on what kind of help is needed when one is alone with young children. Most preschool teachers learn to do without help, but often, if given an aide, can hardly think what to ask her to do first.

That might be the problem. Aides can be awful if you don't train them first. It can be like having one more child to watch and direct and take time with.

You may think it is obvious that disengaging one child from pulling the hair of another is a priority if this helper comes in and finds the teacher trying to save the goldfish from the fishbowl that just broke. But don't count on it.

Many people in child care think that a good child care worker is born, not made. Some of us just know you need eyes in the back of your head, and yelling across a room at a child is not as effective as holding a hand and talking and walking with a child.

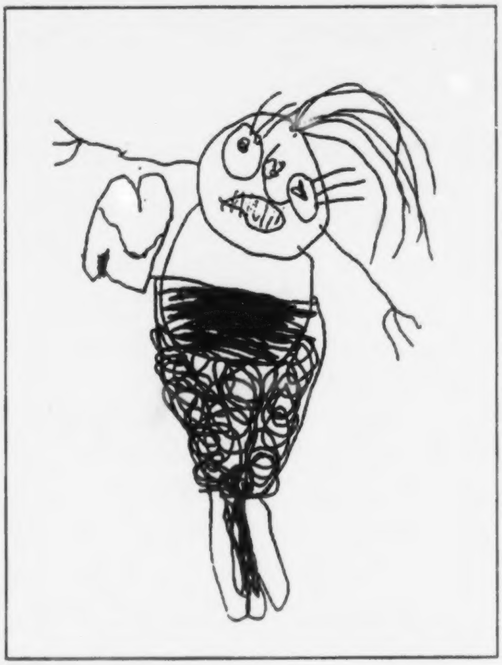
Aides can be awful if you don't train them first.

Just because everyone says they love children doesn't mean everyone is skillful at working with them in ways that help them to learn and helps the other adults around them to feel like members of a team, instead of a group in need of an airport controller.

If you have been assigned an aide, get it clear with your director that you have some authority to let the person know in what ways he or she will be aiding you. Directors don't want teachers to act as though they have been given an indentured servant to order around. Maybe they have hired someone they want trained to be more than an aide some day. In your state, an aide may not need to have any units in child development. A qualified teacher may be giving her a lasting role model for what early childhood education is all about. What is true in your state or with your child care center will have an effect on how you use your aide. Here are some expectations:

Aides should support a teacher. If the teacher is singing with the group at circle time, the aide can round up who is not coming to group (if that is required), or she can sit by a child who is restless.

If it is clean up time, she can hand things to children to put away, and help clean up in a subtle way because she knows children are supposed to be learning and not using her as a maid.



A good aide watches the teacher and anticipates what she might do to help the program get moving. She is not offended if the teacher corrects her about procedures. She probably needs some compliments along with the instructions.

An aide may have skills but not the required coursework to be a teacher. If she works well with children, a teacher may find her co-teaching as she reads stories well, uses appropriate language and takes responsibility for clothing and housekeeping without being asked.

A teacher who can appreciate this enrichment of a program and say, "I'm learning from her!" is behaving in a way that helps the school. When the relationship between teacher and aide is cooperative and not competitive, children are seeing good role models.

No one staff member is perfect anyway. It's good when staff members have talents that compliment each other. One teacher has a nice personality and a way with parents, another is shy with adults but relates well and is very attentive to all the children. One aide is wonderful at getting good paints set up and another is good at knowing whose clothes belong to whom.

Oftentimes, people who do not speak standard English come to work in preschools. A director needs to weigh the needs of a school. Children are learning a whole language for the first time, will there be enough good role models for them if an aide with an accent is hired? Is integrating an aide, no matter what the language capabilities, similar to enrolling a child with a disability?

It is against the law to discriminate on the basis of language, so directors must weigh a person's merits before hiring anyone. The children come first. It is possible to work with a speech therapist to rid oneself of an accent, but maybe an accent becomes an asset to the school because it enriches the children's tolerance for differences and shows that the aide is special.

When an aide is a student who is doing field work learning what goes on in a child care center, the teacher has an awesome role. That person can be learning how to work with children in a way that will affect many other children that she works with for years to come. It is a big responsibility and if a teacher models the very best of everything she knows and can do, she is doing a good service for children.

Think what children learn about human relations when the adults around them help one another effectively.

Caring for Kids With Special Needs

Preschool teachers don't have to be urged to care about little children, but sometimes having a child whose development is not typical can drain a teacher's resources away from other children and leave her puzzled and frustrated.

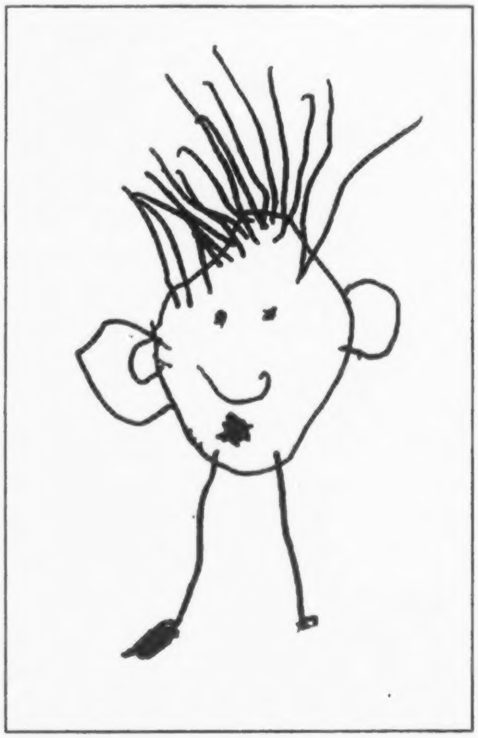
The Americans with Disabilities Act urges any facility that cares for children to consider making a space for children who are challenged physically, mentally, socially or educationally. This means that preschool teachers with no coursework in special education have to figure out how to handle children who may be enrolled for mainstreaming.

Hang in there. You can do it. One way to learn to integrate the exceptional child is to take workshops that are offered for teachers to learn about autism, cerebral palsy, Downs Syndrome, speech and language delays, prenatal exposure to alcohol and drugs, Attention Deficit Disorder, Tourette's Syndrome and other behavioral challenges.

For immediate help with a newly enrolled challenging child, a parent is one's best resource. Teachers must have a chance to learn all they can from a child's parent.

Often times, a child must have a shadow, or personal assistant available to the child. This makes the teacher's job easier. But what is the teacher's job?

Experienced teachers know that when any new child comes to the program, at least some of the children will feel jealous. Their territory is being invaded by a stranger! Their teacher's attention is being shared with a newcomer! You may notice some pushes and shoves and "I'm not your friend."



It's wonderful when a new special needs child is an instant favorite. This happens too, but often any new child will need a teacher's watchful eye while he or she finds a place in the group.

When the new child has unusual traits or an out of the ordinary appearance, teachers need to do some skillful teaching. The goal is to increase children's tolerance for differences. At circle time, a teacher might point out differences among the staff. " I wear glasses and have skin that's a little wrinkled." An older teacher may say, "Our teacher Jamie has pink skin and likes to sing. Our teacher Eric has coffee and cream colored skin and likes to show you his ant farm. We are all different!"

A teacher might bring many different colored seashells and compare them and then have children compare skin colors. She may have a puppet with a crutch or "stick." These things make the teacher feel he or she is doing her best, but it is not necessarily easy. Over time, the childrens' growing familiarity with each other and the teacher sticking to rules of decency will become more harmonious.

Sometimes teachers must be firm, if there is name calling or rejection, but often they might consider how difficult it is for a young child to understand and appreciate differences. They often won't try new foods and new places easily, so why shouldn't it be hard to tolerate a new person?

When a child has a missing limb, other children may need the assurance that "This won't happen to you." Many a grown person whose sibling was challenged in some way grew up getting less attention then he or she might have otherwise received. The trick is to have children appreciate and enjoy each other in some way. Some of us have things that makes us special, some of us teach others to be caring and have empathy. That is the challenge for teachers who work with challenged children.

Each Minute Counts

Caring for young children in the years in which they form their self confidence, and their ideas about what's right and wrong, is a big responsibility. Their lives are affected forever by what the adults who care for them provide. Add to this the fact that they are learning so quickly. *A child's time is precious.* In spite of the hard job teachers, aides and directors have, paying attention to what we do that will have lasting value to our children is something to think about each day.

> Yes, someone sat on the expensive drum you had, but lots of strong laundry soap bottles can be used to make wonderful sounds too!

If a child's time is precious, should the books that are available be of a good quality? To get the units needed to be a preschool teacher, sometimes children's literature is offered, but if you didn't take literature, do you know what makes a valuable book for young children? If you have no say over what books your preschool owns, comfort yourself with the fact that the most important thing is your presence in reading to a child in a caring way. If a child loves you and you are taking time by reading a story to the child, that can be enough. But there is more. Young children need picture books — not the latest popular movie put into book form. Picture books need big picture and very few, simple words.

Remember, with a child on your lap, your caring and your interest in the child or the story will last a lifetime. It's good if the book has a lasting message as well. Avoid letting children listen to a recorded book. All teachers can read and it's more likely to be wiggle free. Only with music, should teachers get away with recorded help.

To get quality books, teachers can always go to the library and ask the children's librarian what are the best books for the age group a teacher works with.

Every school has some music available to children. There are records and disks and tape recorders. Some have a music teacher. It's lucky for children when they have a teacher who sings or is willing to learn to sing with them. So many preschool teachers dismiss music time with, " I can't carry a tune." If these teachers sit with a tape recorder on their laps and lip sing, it's as good as a weekly music teacher because the children learn that the person who is most important to their well being at school enjoys music!

Early childhood education is all about creating attitudes about subjects that will last as children go through school. If hearing stories is boring or the teacher hates the noise of musical instruments, will the child get interested in books or music?

Even if you didn't take a course in music for young children, you probably know that taking music lessons helps children learn to read. Singing songs is beginning music, like scribbling is the beginning writing.

Preschools create a lasting interest in music when children can move and sing, listen to every style of music, from Bach to Reggae, and music is valued. Yes, someone sat on the expensive drum you had, but lots of strong laundry soap bottles can be used to make wonderful sounds too!

Computers can make good sounds as well. When a school chooses a computer program for the children it's good to think, "What lasting value does this have?" While children stay transfixed in front of the screen for long periods of time, are they learning what you want them to learn, like cooperation, the ability to stay focused, and being decent to people? A game or program that reinforces what children might see in violent television and interactive videos is really giving children something that unfortunately can last a lifetime. Child care centers that take care in choosing computer programs that contribute something to the child's learning know how precious a child's time is.

It's wonderful that media can be controlled by adults these days. Providing good videos can keep bad commercials and dangerous programs off of the agenda for children.

Best of all, children have teachers who are faithful to them and let them know they are worthwhile being with, even though they have so much to learn in so short a time.

Take a Close Look at Taking Turns

All day long teachers hear these words: "He hit me." She took my trike. It's mine. She won't give me a turn. I had it first."

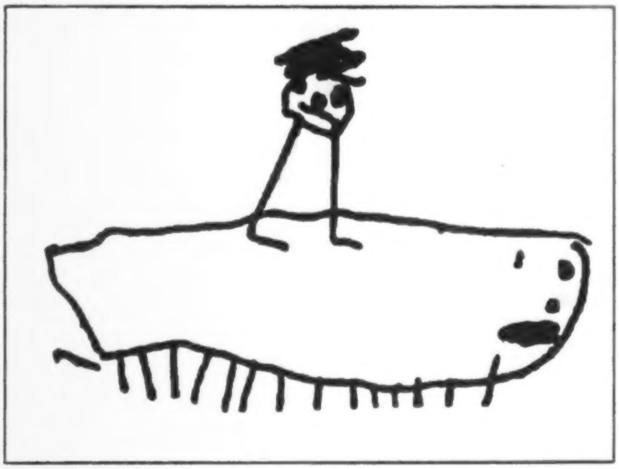
Experienced teachers know that arguments are like rocks on the trail to where you want to go and what you want to do with children. And they know they must stop and look at those rocks. How teachers handle these things is a big part of their valuable teaching.

A child who comes to preschool at two and grabs everything she wants, needs to learn to take turns. Saying "Now it's Sara's turn," is step one. Teachers must keep their eyes open and be *sure that the child using the object gets it to Sara, or tells Sara it's her turn."* Sure, Sara may no longer be interested or teacher can't do this all the time, but why will children be willing to give up grabbing if there are no rewards for it?

If teachers want less whining and arguing about ownership then they must put effort into seeing that children develop faith that they will get a turn. This is much trickier than it seems. Schools that have children count to 25 before they get a turn on the swings or a tricycle need more swings and more tricycles. Children should be able to take as long a turn as they need with materials. If equipment is scarce, someone needs to get to garage sales. It is an educational necessity.

Even when there is enough for children, they will develop preferences for favorite things and fight over them. It seems that learning to take turns is inevitable. When a teacher follows through on taking turns, she creates a feeling of caring between children. A child who has had a long turn on the favorite swing can get off feeling, "I got mine, so there!" or he can get off and be reminded that we care about doing the right thing. "Don't forget to tell your friend you're finished, he wanted it so badly," can be said to establish the concept. Teachers can reinforce this at circle time, acting out a scene with puppets or on a flannel board.

Little children want to establish power for themselves in a group, so they will feel secure and not helpless. Claiming property makes them feel powerful. Sensitive teachers want to be on the side of children, helping them feel there is enough and there are rules to help everyone who wants a turn to get one. When children are anxious that there is not enough, it needs to be met with sympathy and good sense. Their lifelong sense of well being is influenced by how teachers help with this.



Children cannot share until they feel they own something. When sharing is forced it depends on someone policing things. Some children will be forceful about getting the most they can for themselves, others hang back and need coaching to stick up for themselves. All of them need to learn the right thing to do is to care about other people getting a turn and to learn that taking a turn is really satisfying.

What's Behind Squeezing and Mess Making?

The pet guinea pig is in a nice nest of alfalfa on the floor. A group of children surround him. Suddenly there is great squealing as a child holds the animal and squeezes it like some big tube of tooth paste. It's easy for a teacher to resort to standard remarks when children do outrageous things. "We don't squeeze our animals!" But thoughtful teachers want to react to things in ways that will move the child's understanding of things forward.

Every teacher should know that the first stage of learning is to explore materials. A preschool child doesn't take clay and make a bowl the first time he plays with it. He's more likely to pound it or sit on it. Children paint their hands a lot before they paint the paper on the easel. They will decorate themselves with marking pens if you don't watch them. If we always stop children from doing what they are doing, we may be undermining learning.

> A squishy ball, or stuffed toy should always be next to a pet.

A squishy ball, or stuffed toy should always be next to a pet. "It is fun to squeeze things. Let's squeeze this, not our guinea pig," acknowledges the normalcy of an action while controlling it.

It's best to let children use just their hands with new clay and playdough, before bringing out tools. Digging hands into soft material teaches them about it's qualities. Pouring is one of the most satisfying activities for young children. A big container full of cornmeal, rock salt, cornstarch or rice holds the attention of a group for a long time as they use funnels, sifters, strainers, cups, spoons, and bowls to get the feel of things. "We throw balls! Cornmeal stays in this pouring table," is something that needs to be said. Every whim of children can't be allowed, but understanding where it comes from and diverting the action is better than just stopping it.

After children have a phase of exploring materials, they become creative with them. Scribbles turn into drawings and letters. A rolling pen may be needed to make playdough pancakes. Maybe the guinea pig will turn into the baby in the stroller—if he survives all that fondling.

Sobbing Children

You wouldn't be in child care if a sobbing child didn't make you want to comfort the poor thing. It comforts you as well, if a little one puts a head on your shoulder, hangs on tight, and stops crying. An older child might sit under your friendly arm and stop the sound of that deep hurt that tugs at you so. Sometimes it just seems impossible to comfort a child, however, so here are some ideas to help when you are so willing to help, but are not being effective in getting the sobbing to stop.

Physical needs

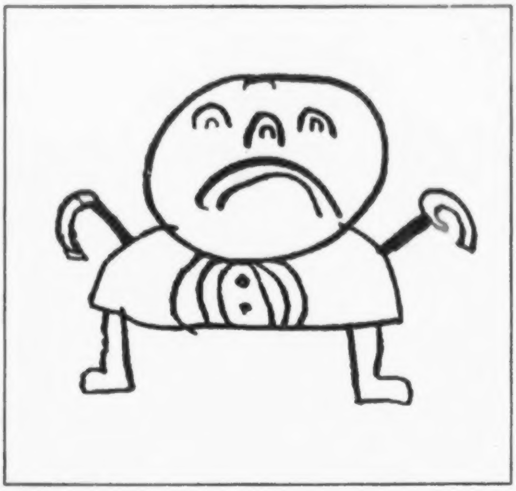
Very young children associate toilet needs with mother. They will start crying if they need a potty time, or diaper change. When you start getting frustrated at your lack of skill in comforting a child with good words of feedback, lead the child to the bathroom, then offer a drink of water or wipe his steamy face with a cool towel. A little mothering is needed before the child gets back on his feet to hear your words: "Mommy wants me to take care of you until she comes back," or, "It's sure tough to learn to take turns with toys in school."

Emotional needs

As much as children love being with other children and enjoy your program, they will all have hard transition times. We hate to get out of bed some mornings, and love our weekends too. Expressing that you understand the child's longing for the familiar people and familiar home setting is comforting.

Children who live in more than one household may be adjusting to a transition from mom's to dad's place, or grandma's to parent's place, as well as to the school. You can reflect this for a child.

Set up a simple calendar for a child to look at. Draw symbols for the days a child goes to one house or another. "The blue car is for when daddy brings you to school. The yellow sun is for when grandma picks you up from school. The red flower is for a day you are at mommy's house." Some schools suggest a different colored lunch box for different homes.



Children need to see the routine of their lives to feel some stability. You might even have to say, "You get lots of surprises. Sometimes you like to be surprised because mommy comes for you. Sometimes the surprise upsets you, but you're learning that's the way it is, just like you learned to keep your share toy on the share table, and to write your name."

Helping children express the anger they feel about their caregivers is important too. "Dads have to get to work. It makes you mad if he says to hurry and that's that. He's going to get the money your family needs so he can have a car to drive you in, food to feed you, a warm place for you to live. Dads have important things to do and bring you to us to take good care of you for him."

Some children start crying and remind you of a car alarm going off.

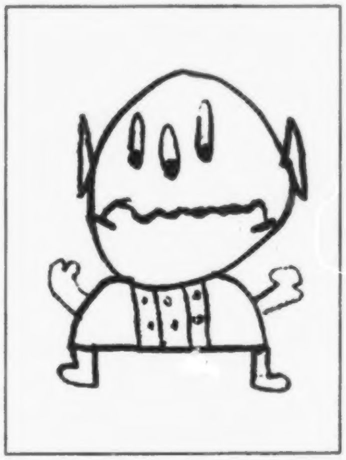
If we always step into a child's world and express their feelings for them, it gives them some comfort. They also need to hear the things they have to put up with and learn to live with.

Learned behavior

Are people born with the same instinctive tendencies as animals who are threatened? Do we have an inherited tendency to fight, flee or freeze when we are upset? One child is furious while he cries over the loss of an argument, another runs away and won't answer you because you ask, "What happened before you hit him?"

Another child gets sullen and quiet. You soon learn each child's tendencies, especially the ones who get into a crying jag and make you feel anything but sympathetic.

Some children start crying and remind you of a car alarm going off. They just don't stop. They have learned to cause a big rumpus and make everyone else suffer if they have to suffer.



"I'll listen when you stop crying." falls on deaf ears. Such learned behavior should be replaced with the use of words, but it seems impossible. If you can find your empathy for such a predicament, you can be more effective. Think how bad it is for a child to be helpless instead of effective when he or she is in trouble. Then let children know you want to help them get what they want so they don't have to be so miserable and make other people miserable too.

Get the tape recorder and have a circle time where children talk and hear their own voices. It really tickles them. Later on, keep the crier's normal voice on a separate tape, then when there is a crying jag, tape this. Later on, when the child has settled down and you have good rapport with the child, play the tape. Ask, "This is how you sound when you use your real voice. This is how you sound when you forget to use your words and cry. Is this how you want to sound?" Be careful doing this, because the child should be enlightened because he sees the problem, not because you are shaming him. You are the teacher who cares about the child learning and that must be more important than your annoyance about the behavior.

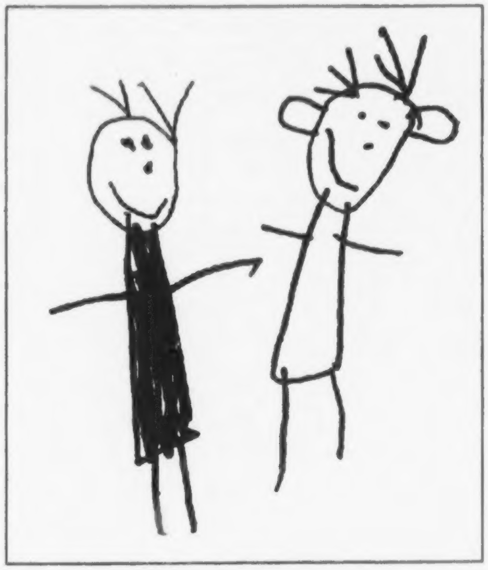
Crying releases stress. The chemical composition of tears from crying is different than that of ordinary tears. It's good to release stress! But good teachers hug with words that work. To ignore crying models indifference for pain to the children who are watching you react to crying. If crying does not call for comfort, or you have done all you can and have many other things to do, the children should hear you say what's happening. "Poor Johnny just wants to cry a bit. He doesn't want a hug. He's mad. He just has to get all his tears out, then he'll feel better. I know that's hard to hear isn't it?" It's lucky if you can hand such a child over to someone else, as a change often stops the behavior and a child is relieved to stop as well.

In centers where all the children start a school year at once, the chorus of grieving over the parents going away can be horrendous.

Teachers might be sure to have baby dolls and blankets available, as children will often play out their own need for comfort with these toys, instead of their voices. Teachers should be sure to go home and have a big cry after these tough days. It's good for you.

Will Children Take After You Someday?

"I want to be a firefighter when I grow up," says a child. Thank goodness there's been nothing bad in the papers about the fire department, a teacher might think. Every preschool hopes children will remember a good image of policemen from the officer who came to school to show them his police car. They hope parents will not let children see news and programs that show their current favorite authority or sports figure doing something we don't want children to do when they grow up. Sometimes the only hero a child can feel certain about is one like Batman, but he is always bopping someone with no teacher telling him to "Use your words!"



Adults have to show children that the effort to grow up is worth the trouble. How are they going to do it, when heroes don't measure up so often?

The answer is, teachers! People who are with the children all day might not realize that they are very important models for their class, but it's true. They are real superheros. Children will learn many things from teachers that they will want to imitate someday. It's an important responsibility. Staff members who show and tell personal assets influence children.

A teacher who is going to school after work models someone who is a hard worker and wants to learn things! How about showing the children all of the books she reads for her classes? Of course they should see her in a cap and gown when she graduates one day.

> When teachers who are overweight, make light of their shape instead of demeaning themselves they model self-respect.

Anyone who is a bike rider, surfer, runner or works out in a gym regularly has a good Halloween costume to wear for the Halloween or Purim parade or when there is an Olympic games theme for the week. Parents too, appreciate knowing the staff and what the staff might introduce to children.

It's a lucky school that has teachers who learned to play instruments or studied music and can show children how violins are held, how trumpets and flutes are blown, and how a singer does scales.

Every day teachers show they value children's creative use of paints and materials things that they glue and construct.

If a teacher is an artist, it's good for her to share *her own work*. That doesn't mean she cuts out things that the children should make to look like her models. It means just showing her creation and saying, "I did this." If teachers must make cutouts that children will finish, it's honest to say, "We made these things together. I cut out the bunnies and you stuck on the cotton." Honesty is good role modeling too.

Teachers can model good health practices too. They can know what the food pyramid is and eat foods that show their knowledge, when they are with children.

When teachers who are overweight, make light of their shape instead of demeaning themselves, they model self-respect. Children usually do not like differences, and obese children can be treated with cruelty. The obese teacher should remain dignified and tolerant of her shape, just as she is of the colors and shapes of the children she works with.

Whatever skills or accomplishments teachers have, children should know about them. Teachers are superheros to children, even though they don't wear masks and capes.

Why is Circle Time a Circus?

What does a teacher do when she is ready for a circle time and some child won't come ? What if they all come, but someone always uses the group time to call attention to the fact that he or she is determined not to pay attention? What's happening?

Some programs don't bring children together for stories, songs, and teaching all at once. These things are offered, but are optional. The idea is that children are exploring the world for the first time when they come to a child care center. These schools believe that children should learn to make their own choices, because they will live in a democracy where making choices is important. Maybe if their freedom to learn and do what they feel is important is respected early on, they will keep their natural feeling of being worthwhile and see the world and others as good. They may register to vote one day, care about not polluting the environment, and be responsible citizens and love the work they do.

Other child care centers feel a need to get children into a group each day to teach these very things. They reason that being a cooperative member of a group needs to be learned by consistent experiences in a group.

They feel it's important to sing everyone's name, give each one a chance to see who is in their group and to be sure all of the children are given the same information that is needed when people live together and share time and space together.

"I wash my hands after I go to the toilet," says the teacher's little hand puppet. Then she sings the nursery rhyme song. "This is the way we wash our hands..." She stands up and the children can make movements to music "This is the way we brush our teeth, fasten our seatbelts, put lunches in the cubby — whatever ideas the teacher feels children need to learn to be good citizens each day and in the future.

What goes wrong with these plans? In every group of children where there are good toys and activities and a teacher who wants to be in early childhood education, there are children who would rather disrupt an activity than participate in it. Teachers can understand that if a child has not been in a group before they need to learn not to jump on a building of blocks someone has just finished, not kick over the train tracks, or run away with the babydoll that's getting breakfast in the dressup area.

When circle time comes, one or more often decide it's time to practice long distance running. When children are finally rounded up and seated, someone else finds an infraction of his space cause for a major temper tantrum.

Teachers who really care about children learning to be cooperative may start yelling so much and so often that they seem to be training children to live in a war torn country of terrorists with a military dictatorship that is losing the battle for stability.

There are some important things teachers can do to keep the climate in a classroom one where cooperation wins over chaos. The first one is to check if giving up personal freedom is worth it for what you have to offer in exchange. The other is having the strength needed for the strength of your convictions.

Make a group time attractive

Casually telling children, "It's circle time, let's come together," will always be easier at the end of the year than at the beginning. Young children learn routines, because the same thing happens with the same consequences for a long period of time. ***Make it a habit to have a signal that circle time is beginning.*** Whatever teacher's do, children like to imitate, so if teachers don't want the lights turned off and on all morning long, turning them off and on is not a good signal. It's best to have a song or chant. When children hear "It's time to..." sung to London Bridges or some other tune, they eventually join in when they hear it. Some towns have church bells to signal time. Some countries have police using loudspeakers. In a democracy, we want children to get an internal signal that it's time for doing what is good to do for the good of everyone, including themselves. Whether children come to the group after hearing a familiar tune or a rhyme, the sound of the triangle, or the beat of a drum, how does a teacher get them to look at her and not who's sitting in the space they want? How does she get them to want to hear her words instead of tickling each other?

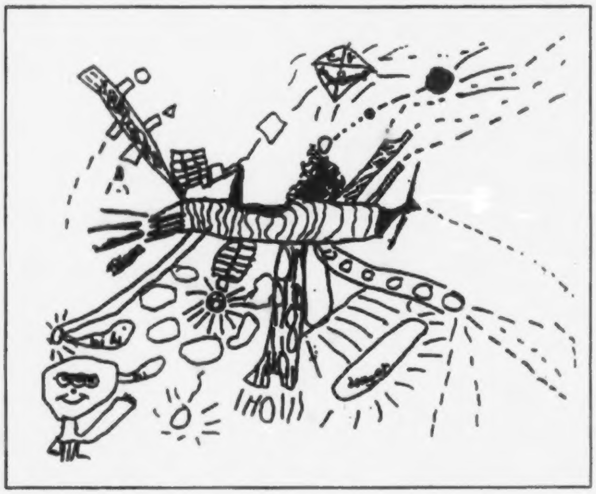
> A teacher who consistently acts to protect her plans protects the group from lawlessness.

Children are used to being entertained these days. Every television program starts with some startling vision of sweets to eat, or bad guys to punch, or great things to own.

Chances are good that a teacher competes with these learned expectations. Teachers need to be dynamic and they need to be consistent. Their dynamic presence and devoted caring can let children see that a simple time is enjoyable too.

With a puppet that is *just the teacher's* she can work wonders like Tiny Tots, or Mister Rogers. Some teachers have a cone puppet called Mr. Music. He only comes out of his cone if the teacher and children sing "Mr. Music, where are you?" He's very shy and sinks back in if it is noisy.

Like any popular writer these days, the teacher grabs her audience early on and holds it's attention so she can teach it what she wants to teach.



She uses flannel boards one day, a bunch of picture cards the next day. She not only reads stories but she can sing some. She may put on a hat and act like a chef to teach about cooking and suggest children watch some cooking shows on the television. She introduces new songs and is not afraid to let children gallop like horses, or crawl like turtles, because she has a signal for when it is time to come back to the circle.

Children in a group tend to act like a flock of birds, who will fly up in the air, squawk awhile and then settle down again. Waiting patiently for them to settle down often works.

But what about those children who act as though the together time is optional or a place to stage a display of all their grievances in life?

A wise teacher knows that children crave attention. Everyone wants to be visible. Even the shyest among us is hurt if no one acknowledges our birthday. Children who are chronically disruptive need to have a great deal of attention for acceptable behavior, *just before group time*. When this doesn't work, the child may be one that has learned to get attention by negative behavior.

Avoid anger, use firm tactics

When a teacher stops circle time to give the child just what he wants, it is like pouring gasoline on a fire. Controlling the child that has learned this needs to be done quietly as much as is possible. An aide can sit with such a child, or remove him or her. It can be made clear that disruption means no circle time. This is hard because the teacher wants the child there and the child wants to be there.

Adults need to be as forceful about the group's need to be learning cooperative behavior, as they are about caring for the quality of the program that is offered.

A teacher who consistently acts to protect her plans protects the group from lawlessness. It's not fair to the majority to let them be robbed of what they need. Yet the very disruptive child may be the neediest of all and must be attended to later on.

In a quiet moment, later in the day, the teacher should say this." I miss not having you be with us because the story was one you would have loved. We talked about the school picnic. We didn't get to hear about your new jacket you are wearing. What can we do about this so you can learn how to be together with us?" Getting such children's cooperation is not easy. You must be catching them doing something right all day long. You must take special time with the play yard fights to see that they move from blind scrapping to thinking and talking about the issues that they are so passionate about. Some children need to be assessed for what may be a developmental problem or delay. A teacher should take notes on behavior, but when presenting these to a director, she doesn't have a leg to stand on, if she cannot show that the program she presents shows her efforts at being engaging, consistent and worthwhile.

Circle time is the very place where a teacher can introduce children to the kinds of things they need to hear to make sense of their struggles to grow up in the world.

In the book, *The Fire House Cat*, Mrs. Goodkind says to a renegade cat named Pickles, "Look how big your paws are, you are meant for big things. You are not a good cat. You are not a bad cat. You are a mixed up cat."

This is something all children should hear in early childhood, to know about their behavior in a group as they prepare for the world they will live in when they are grown.

Are Children Watching Teacher's Disagreements?

> Children usually see their parents fight at home, so if teachers can fight fairly and demonstrate good problem solving, it can really enrich a child's experience in a preschool.

Being a preschool teacher is such fun when you look around the yard and see all the children getting along with each other. A bunch are under a hideout they made, some are industriously making pancakes on the edge of the sandbox, others are playing chase with happy faces or giving someone a ride on the backs of tricycles.

Invariably the spell is broken. At the worst, one child bites another. Or a group may come up to you like they have a class action suite against a boy who goes into hiding fast. You become the mediator or judge because you want children to learn to get along. You do this all day long. But what if you aren't getting along well with another staff member? It happens.

People who work together have different ideas about things and it causes conflicts. Teachers may be tight lipped about their feelings. They may be curt and cold to each other, or they may be continually asking for someone to do this and that. Whatever teachers do with their disagreements, at least some children are likely to notice. If we tell children they should get along, but our problems with each other never change, it can spoil our teaching.

Still, it's aggravating if one teacher always cleans up the lunch tables because another teacher is slow to move. It's awful when a teacher doesn't leave a yard clean for the teacher who will follow, or who loses the scissors and scotch tape just when you need them. Just as bad is a teacher who will scold a child harshly when you have been trying to get the child to feel safe enough to be comfortable in the group, or when someone won't enforce the rule you and your group just made after 20 minutes of planning in circle time.

What should teachers do about their own play yard fights, so that they are not distracted from giving their work with the children all their energy and thoughts.

It is a bad work scene if one is always resentful or on edge about someone else. One thing teachers can do is *use their words.* Not many teachers have trouble telling a child. "Sometimes I cry too," or, "Sometimes I make mistakes too." So it should not be embarrassing to say, "Teacher Joan and I disagree. We have to talk about our problem." If this is done as soon as a problem comes up, children may see and hear adults airing their grievances and trying to compromise. If it is just too steamy an issue, it's best for the children to hear, "Let's talk about it at staff, or let's talk about it later." Children usually see their parents fight at home, so if teachers can fight fairly and demonstrate good problem solving, it can really enrich a child's experience in a preschool. "Friends fight and makeup," is a good thing to say to children and to show them as well, when differences arise between you and other staff members. After all, you aren't going to bite each other.

Children Who are Spanked

Finding bruises on a child's buttocks these days means finding yourself in the process of reporting child abuse. There are laws to protect children from harm, but there must be evidence as well.

But what if you know that children are spanked at home and there are no marks on the child? These children are hurting inside more than most of the public knows.

Violent crimes are on the increase in most states, but in those states where children are spanked for misbehavior in schools, the violent crime rate is higher.

Depression in adulthood is often triggered by the memory of childhood hitting. Hitting children to discipline them is also the root cause of spousal abuse.

When an adult wants to change misbehavior by hitting, the child grows up to automatically want to hit someone who is not doing what he or she wants them to do.

Spanking comes when adults have no skills for managing children's behavior. Can teachers do anything about that?

Most children who are spanked will be the ones who are aggressive toward other children. They treat others the way they are being treated.

Preschools that offer parent education meetings get their best attendance if the subject is "Discipline—getting your child to mind you." That's the good part. The bad part is that the very parents you want to attend are usually missing. Sometimes conferring with parents and being supportive of their goals begins to change spanking practices. After all, a parent who wants to have a child who minds and will be a good citizen is on the right track. A parent who is using physical force on a child to vent his own anger needs to be watched and warned. Spanking can turn into child abuse as well as adult masocism.

Teachers can do more than enforce their rules about using words, not fists, at school. They can empathize with the child whose childhood is full of such violence. "School is a place where we protect you from being hurt. We know you have a good brain to use and we teach you other ways to get what you want." Use good judgment in letting children know that you know it is hard to be hurt by parents who should be caring for them, not hurting them. If they have to live with violence you are truly helpless to stop, then do everything you can to help them value themselves and not feel worthless and angry. Encourage them to be smart about keeping out of trouble. Some children will seek punishment over and over to prove to themselves that they can survive it. Others begin to feel self destructive, or even associate pain with pleasure. How many of the teens doing body piercing where spanked as children?

The arts can help us all deal with pain: "Paint how you feel when someone is mad at you," or let's sing, "He's got the whole world in his hands," because it's a nice song to make us feel better when we have been hurt or we are sad.

Children spend a lot of time with teachers. Your positive influence may last a lifetime. And your courage and persistence in getting a child protected may save a life.

Sane Celebrations

In some communities, children's birthday parties look like they cost as much as a wedding. Preschool children turn into little party animals going from one event to another on weekends. Even when parents can afford this, how are they going to save for college education, considering the cost of toys?

When parents can't say no or can't afford to accept all the invitations, the preschool can help out. If you ask parents to send party invitations to children, rather than post them at school for pickup, there's no need to have to invite the whole class in order not to hurt someone's feelings.

A sane way to set a standard for birthday celebrations is to let a child invite one child more than the age he or she is celebrating. Children can choose who they like and not be overwhelmed by a mob, or even an excessive amount of toys that you will see displayed at share day all year long. Toys often turn share day into a "bring and brag" session that makes you wonder why you ever started it.

Every school has it's own way of celebrating children's birthdays, and this helps parents out as well. One school helps the birthday child make a cake. Another school has decorated a coffee can with felt and the child blows out candles stuck into the lid. Mother brings a treat for the class.

> In some communities, children's birthday parties look like they cost as much as a wedding.

Celebrations are fun for everyone, but do they have lasting value for the children in child care centers? Some schools have decided that holidays should be celebrated at home! That's because their school population has so many different cultural groups. To be fair to every family, celebrations would take place so regularly there would be little time for having the dentist come to visit, enjoy a day to share pets from home, or plant a garden.

Schools help children and families when they surround children with a calm environment, rich with learning opportunities. Celebrations tend to become entertainment, not education.

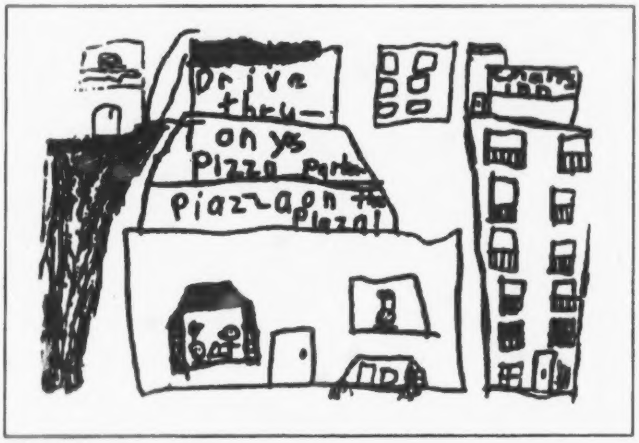
Yet other schools use holidays from other countries to teach cultural diversity and make it worthwhile. But are there other things to celebrate in the lives of children?

Some schools celebrate when a child has learned to ride the two wheeler. The child gets a crown to wear. The same kind of crown goes to the child who lost a tooth, or learned to write his or her name.

Singling out children for applause must be done with care about what impact it may have. When parents drive around with bumper stickers that say, "My child is an honor student at————school," are we teaching competitiveness?

Teachers who want children to live in a peaceful world notice that no country started a war because the people couldn't read or write. Countries start wars because people can't get along with each other.

Whatever we teach young children who absorb so much from us, so early in their lives, shouldn't it be something that carefully considers how to live well and sanely with other people?



First Aid for Working With a Difficult Child

Child care workers, like firemen, police and nurses have some hazards in the workplace. We risk getting bitten, scratched, bumped into with tricycles, catching every cold virus in the world and getting chicken pox. But we can heal from all of these injuries. Sometimes it's harder to work with a child who is difficult.

Good early childhood teachers often go home thinking about their children. We wonder if we were too harsh with a child, or if we should have been more forceful because other children were intimidated by a member of the group we work with. Seeing children learn and grow is part of the joy that makes our job worthwhile. When we come across children who don't respond to our well planned lessons, or great craft ideas, we can attribute it to immaturity for a while, but when behavior is so oppositional we go home every night just thinking about that one child, it's a kind of wound worse than an illness. Like an illness, it absorbs us. It hurts our self-esteem, makes us question our competence, makes us aggravated with the office who assigned the child to us, and shakes our faith in ourselves as a person who loves children. This one is not lovable most of the time!

Never mind about your heart. Use your head, get yourself some first aid. Maybe you are doing the same thing over and over to get a child to cooperate and it's not working. Try something else.

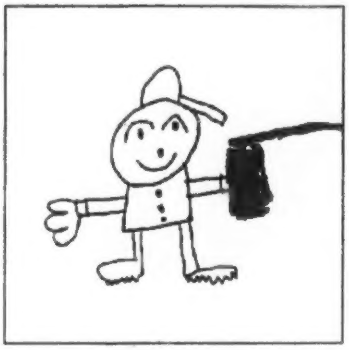
When children can make a loud noise without hurting anyone, they feel powerful.

Find out if this child is difficult for other teachers as well. Some teachers love rescuing a child who is out of sorts. They want to try their own skills to reach the child. Can you ask this person to let the child visit while you let one of hers visit you? You need to be brave enough to find out if you are the only one who finds the child hard to work with and the difficulty lies inside you.

Adults working with children who look inside themselves every once in a while and figure out why they react as they do to the children they work with are on the right track. A child you love may remind you of yourself or your own child in a good way. Another may remind you of the neighborhood boy who made your childhood miserable. Teachers can stop and know who they are and where they are. They can see that they are adults with experience and education as well as the facility to get more education or information for what they do. They are adults with competence, and no longer little children still hurting from something.

This internal questioning helps if it's true that other teachers don't have the same trouble that you do with a child. But if they do, here are some other hints for moving the child forward in his growth.

Narrate what happens. "You don't want to sit in the circle. I can't help you do that now, but I don't like it and I will talk to you about this later." It gives children a lot of negative power, if the group's need is less important than they are. Try to discover why this child has to be disruptive. You may know already if the director



has given you some information. Always warn the child before circle time that it is hard for him or her to sit and not be special, but you will help him be special. Does the child want to hold the story you will read, or sit on your lap? Changing your tactics with children can be so startling that they are shaken out of their habits of bad behavior. Other times they wonder why you are so dumb not to get after them. What is important to know, is that the child should not feel you are bamboozled.

You must be in charge, even if it is to decide to let the child be in charge. "It's so hard for you to join our group, I'm going to let you wander for a while. It's OK. You're a good learner. You learned to shoot baskets with the basketball this week. You will learn to sit with the group someday too."

Such a surrender of your old rule that isn't working anyway is sometimes a great relief for a teacher. You can like the child better and think of more ways to turn things around.

Counselors tell teachers to stop bad behavior immediately. Children learn that the adults have no limits and they feel exhilarated by the control they get. But teachers take a while to learn what a child is all about. They may have been making excuses for the child as they assess if he or she has immature behavior, is getting sick, or being angry because mom has to leave in a hurry each day. Teachers who work with young children are often loving and helpful to little ones and just need some help being consistent and forceful without damaging a child's growing sense of independence.

While you decide what to do with a difficult child, remember that your best technique is to always describe what is happening. "I'm sitting with you because you hit Joey so hard his lip was bleeding. You were so angry at Joey. He stepped on your sand castle. That made you hit him. You made a good sand castle. You were so angry."

As you say something like this, you are buying time to decide if the child needs more support for his needs before he hurt someone, or if you will say, "I can't let children hurt each other. I have to keep you safe too."

Experience tells teachers that children don't learn anything in the heat of anger. When the child has settled down, it's time to ask, "What can you do next time?" If you get a silent scowl, you tell him what he or she can do next time. Letting the child know you really care about him, in spite of his behavior, may just demonstrate that "love conquers all." This and coaching like, "Get your control. Get your control," might change things.

Children need many ways to feel powerful, as they learn that they must conform to rules that take away their power. Getting civilized enough to be with other people means giving up the power to grab, to run away, or push others.

Here are some activities that make children feel powerful:

Roofing nails and a hammer. Pound nails into a tree stump. Such an activity would be dangerous unless you have glasses for the children and an aide who can sit by one child at a time. This activity really hits the nail on the head by letting children know how strong they are getting. Substitute activities that challenge positive strength for bullying and being disruptive as often as possible.

Tie soda cans onto the tricycles. When children can make a loud noise without hurting anyone, they feel powerful. It won't hurt your ears as much as the previews in the local movie theater you go to.

Tear bed sheets. When two children take an end of a strip of sheet and pull, it makes a loud noise and takes a while to do. It's a preschool tug of war that is very satisfying, but you have to watch all the strings you get, so they don't wind up around someone's neck.

Have a yell contest. Sit the children down in a row and say, "I want to hear how loudly you can yell!" It could be a George of the Jungle contest, done in fun. Sometimes the most aggressive children don't have the loudest yells. What might that mean to you? Do you have a child who feels so powerless inside that he or she is always trying to prove something in your classroom?

Drums for all the children are available if you save enough large plastic containers. A kitchen drum orchestra can be loud and soft, or fast and slow. And some children can play a solo—the difficult child who has you puzzled can be chosen before he acts up.

If a teacher has provided outlets that make children feel powerful, and has used many techniques for eliciting cooperation, maybe it's important to add a home visit to establish more rapport with the child. Maybe it's time to know that children learn slowly and while they are doing it, they often teach us more patience and more skills by being so challenging.

Conflicts with Center Policies

Everyone goes into preschool work feeling they know what's good for little children. The teacher knows, the aide knows, the director knows. What happens when they don't agree?

Directors or owners write the mission statements a child care center presents to the public. They make the policies and sell the program to the parents. It's bad business and not ethical to say you do one thing and then do another. Teachers are obligated to make the school honest.

Conflicts are inevitable. One school wants children to be naturalists. They give children plastic bug jars to catch beetles and dig for sow bugs. A teacher squirms. She hates worms and is horrified when ants crawl up the trash can.

Another school will not tolerate any fighting over toys. If children argue, it's the director's policy that the toys are taken away. A teacher may have gone to workshops on mediation and peacemaking, she wonders how she can teach children to settle arguments if arguments are not allowed.

The easiest thing to do about procedures you don't like is to complain about them, roll up your eyes when the director is effusive about those bugs, or tell your husband how ignorant the school administration is. How do teacher's attitudes affect the children they work with?

Every teacher's happiest moments are when children are playing cooperatively together. Should teachers find ways to cooperate as well and be role models for children?

Cooperating means caring about the needs of other people, so that each member of a group can work for a common goal. If a teacher jokes about her intolerance for squirmy things, will a colleague help her out with butterflies for her classroom? No one can resist butterflies, insects though they are.

Besides learning about the place every insect has in the world, is learning about emotional honesty. A teacher can tell children, "Some of you are so brave about catching a praying mantis. I got afraid of bugs when I was a little girl and it's hard for me to touch them. But I think some of you are going to be scientists some day." Different strokes for different folks keeps us from being upset when an adult cannot or will not change a mind set about something.

Administrators who have staff members who might be more enlightened than they are about techniques for working with children, are hard to live with. But they may pay well and it's hard for most preschool teachers to earn what they deserve for the job they do anyway. Teachers need to be good sales people if they want to change policies. No boss wants someone complaining and changing policies unless they know it will be good for the program. It's good to convince a boss that changing a policy might be good for business, as well as children.

It's also a challenge for teachers to make the best of bad situations. If they must remove toys that cause arguments, they might say, "Our school rule is to work together in peace, but that was so tough for you. Let's talk about what went wrong and what we can do about it, so that you can get your turn again." If the rule triggers thinking and talking rather than resentment, it may be just the learning tool for children.

Being told what to do by our bosses can send us to the comics to read Dilbert, makes us act like resistant children, or stimulate us to think! What should children see us doing?

Teacher's Differences Have an Effect on Children

You may wish sometimes that all the staff at your child care center knew everything you know and did things the way you do them, but it's not going to happen.

Children may not notice all the differences between staff members that you do, but they will notice some and they will affect children's knowledge of adults.

One teacher is resourceful. She collects juice cans and has a drum band in her room in no time. She notices when pictures are hanging by one push pin and hangs children's art so it will look as special as the wall of a museum. She mixes great color combinations of paints and chooses wonderful materials for collages so that no matter what children do, the result looks successful. But does she relate well to parents? Does she remember which children have brothers and sisters and what children told her they would be for Halloween? Maybe so. But most teachers have gifts they shine in and qualities they lack.

A teacher may be very sharp about which children need trip slips signed and when the records the office wants are needed. She gets things done without being nagged, but she will send home a white piece of paper with white gunk and a child's name on it, just because the child sloshed on it. She has no idea of using three colors for a project to make it attractive.

> There are the Oscar Madison sloppy teachers and the Felix Unger neat ones.

Some teachers are afraid of animals and insects, others can tell you the names of the spiders on the outside of the building. Some teachers love greeting parents, joking with them and sharing pleasantries. Other teachers are shy around adults but sing and play well with children. Then there are the Oscar Madison sloppy teachers and the Felix Unger neat ones.

A staff often has teachers who measure up in different ways. Children's lives are enriched by their learning how to please or cooperate with different kinds of people.

If differences really interfere with a good program for children, directors need to hear about it and so do the teachers who are not measuring up.

Directors can ask the staff to write a valentine for fellow members, praising their good traits. She can ask staff individually to write down their best qualities and the things they think they need to work on. She can ask, "how can I help you?"

If this isn't going to happen, life is easier at the work site if teachers begin to see that people have a basic way of behaving. They have gifts and liabilities. When workers just accept this, everyone gets along much better, and that's something children feel.

The First Aid Kit of Words

Keep these up your sleeve:

"Kiss your hurt." Of course we are sympathetic to children who have injured themselves. They may even feel pain more than an adult does because they are so brand new and their nerves are closer to the surface of the skin. But some children seem to have so many falls and do so much crying and are so inconsolable, you wonder if they are overly worried about their welfare or needy for attention. You might remember to find times to be more comforting when the child is not hurt.

When you say, "Kiss your hurt," you give children the idea that they can be self-comforting.

"You made her smile!" We all notice when one child has made another child cry. Equal time could go to when children are spontaneously good to each other.

"Remember to tell him when it's his turn." Follow through on those fights over toys and equipment. Make taking turns be a good way to get along in a group.

"Walk away." It takes two to make a fight. If you see children aren't having fun together, remember it is your job to help them enjoy being a member of a group. What you are saying to a child is, if things are unpleasant, get yourself out of there. It's a concept of self-protection.

"Glue your bottom to the floor." When circle time has children getting wiggly, using your imagination to manage their behavior is fun for all. Are children too close to you? "I'm going to blow you back some."(You pretend to blow them like the wind.) Have they left the circle to gallop to music and show no signs of coming back again? Chant, "Come back to the place where you where before." (How smart they were to remember where they were before.)

"Use your words. Here's what I would say....." Children need more coaching than they get about how to be verbal rather than physical. Sometimes their voices should be louder or their words clearer. "That hurts and I don't like it!"

"You get what you get and you smile" Make it an automatic response to anyone fussing about what piece of something they got at the snack table, otherwise you quickly turn into a harassed waiter.

"Sneeze over your shoulder." Are children allergic to cooking projects?

"Rest your body." (Say this at nap time.) Resting repairs body cells and allows new ones to grow. Children who learn to care about their bodies, as well as their lunch boxes and jackets, are doing well with self-help skills.

"Fight with your voice." Don't keep children from the training that a lawyer needs. They may give up the practice of boxing if you let them substitute words for hitting. A loud noisy argument doesn't make anyone bleed.

"You stopped yourself." (From hurting or throwing) Complimenting evidence of self-control is a good idea. Children have to learn to control their impulses and it is hard. It's often hard for adults to control their impulses as well. Who can eat only one potato chip?

"Your mommy is probably thinking about you right now." When children look a little sad, it can be kind to remind them who loves them best of all, but has to go to work for the family.

"You're a learning child!" Substitute "learning" for "big" as often as you can. We can keep learning all our lives. But some children have genes for being small, not big. Why do we value being big so much? In a crowded world, little people use up less space!

"You'll learn. You're a smart child." Give children a promise of their possibilities as often as you can. They may live up to your expectations. If you say this after you have scolded a child, you'll feel less guilty when you drive home after work.

"Good thinking!" Value problem solving. Even "good work" is better than "good boy" or "good girl."

About the Author

Before tending children in her child care center, First Step Nursery School, Bette Simons was a training teacher in the preschool Laboratory at California State University, Northridge.

She once wrote and taught the course, *Childbirth Education*, for the University of California at Berekely, Independent Study.

Bette has been a Preparation for Parenthood Instructor for the American Red Cross, a talk show hostess for *Dialogues in Child Development*, on KCSN public radio, a Mommie and Me teacher, and a college instructor.

She regularly writes a column about young children and child care for the Warner Center News. Bette has appeared in the Parent and preschool Newsletter and is a contributor to this publication's book, *The Parent's and Teacher's Guide to Helping Young Children Learn Creative Ideas from 35 Respected Experts,* edited by Betty Farber, M.Ed.

To Our Readers and Web Surfers

This book was published for First Step Nursery School and Child Development Center, Inc. First Step Nursery School is an independent child care center. In 1986 it was among the first in California to be accredited by the Academy of Early Childhood Programs, an arm of the prestigious National Association for the Education of Young Children.

First Step's mission is to provide quality, developmentally appropriate child care that nourishes children, their parents and their teachers. Our readers include teachers, aides, mothers, fathers, family home day care providers, and directors, whom we invite to share their ideas with us. Write us by mail or on the web.

FREE INFORMATION ON THE WEB. Articles by Bette Simons, for parents and child care workers to copy include: How To Choose Child Care; Biting; When Children Say, "You Can't Play"; In-Laws Who Are Outlaws; Bullies, Crying Children and Guilty Goodbyes; What Parents and Child Care Centers Don't Tell Each Other; and many more.

To order books by Bette Simons: See our web site, or phone our school.

http://www.1ststep.com
email: DBSimons@worldnet.att.net

(818) 887-1045

Order Form

Books by
BETTE SIMONS

Published by
CREATIVE BOOK COMPANY
for
FIRST STEP
NURSERY SCHOOL
and Child Development Center

6104 Fallbrook Ave. • Woodland Hills, CA 91367-3225 • (818) 887-1045
http://www.1stStep.com • email: DBSimons@worldnet.att.net

Book title	Cost	Quantity	Total
WINNING AT CHILD CARING: Easier ways with young children in child care centers, homes and malls	8.00		
CHILD CARE FOR DIAPERED CHILDREN: Happier ways to share the caring of infants, toddlers and two's	7.00		
TIPS FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS: First aid for bad times with directors, parents and difficult children	7.00		

Your name ______________________

School name ______________________

Address ______________________

______________________ Zip __________

Phone ______________________

In California, add 8% tax	
Shipping, postage add $1.50	
TOTAL	

The Parents' & Teachers' Guide to Helping Young Children Learn:

Creative Ideas from 35 Respected Experts

Edited by Betty Farber, M.Ed.

> *"Within these pages lies a cache of riches for you and your preschool child (and/or children) whether you are a parent or a teacher, or both."*
>
> (Excerpted from the foreword by **Nancy Balaban, Ed.D.,** Director, Infant and Parent Development and Early Intervention Program, Graduate School of Education, Bank Street College, New York City.)

$24.95 (US dollars) per book
(Non-exempt New York State residents add 7% sales tax.)

SHIPPING CHARGES:
CONTINENTAL U.S.
UPS Ground: $4/first book, $1/each additional book
UPS 2nd Day Air $8/first book, $3/each additional book

Orders with a Check, Money Order, or Purchase Order
are to be sent to:
Preschool Publications, Inc.
P.O. Box 1167, Cutchogue, NY 11935-0888
1-800-726-1708

Send requests for quantity purchases
or additional information by fax to:
1-516-765-4927

http://www.northfolk.com/preschoolpub
email: preschoolpub@hamptons.com

Tips for Preschool Teachers

TIPS FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS is an easy to read book about the hard times in child care. Directors, teachers, and aides who want to provide a nurturing place for young children while separated from home, will find the answers to their most pressing questions.

- **When good teachers have bad directors, should the children suffer?**
- **Some teachers are either fighting with parents or with each other — what can directors do about this?**
- **What are the best things to do with the child who is difficult to handle?**

Lead, follow, or get out of the way, says long time director and author, Bette Simons. The difficult work of caring for children takes efficiency and skill. Simons' third book addresses the importance of creating a school environment where the program shows concern for the fact that children's time is precious, and staff members grow as much as their preschoolers do. This book will teach you what is essential to make things work well in a child care center.

Books by Bette Simons:

WINNING AT CHILD CARING: Easier ways with young children in child care centers, homes, and malls. The Creative Book Company, Los Angeles, CA. ©1997

CHILD CARE FOR DIAPERED CHILDREN: Happier ways to share the caring of infants, toddlers, and twos. First Step Nursey School, Woodland Hills, CA. ©1997

TIPS FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS: First aid for bad times with directors, parents, and difficult children. First Step Nursey School, Woodland Hills, CA. ©1997

Bette Simons is the director of First Step Nursery School and writes a column about children in child care centers. Free information is available on the web, including articles that child care workers and parents may copy.

FIRST STEP NURSERY SCHOOL and child development center, Inc.
6104 Fallbrook Ave.
Woodland Hills, CA 91367-3225
(818) 887-1045

ISBN 0-8[illegible]409-186-4

http://www.1stStep.com
email: DBSimons@worldnet.att.net

$7.00

BEST COPY AVAILABLE